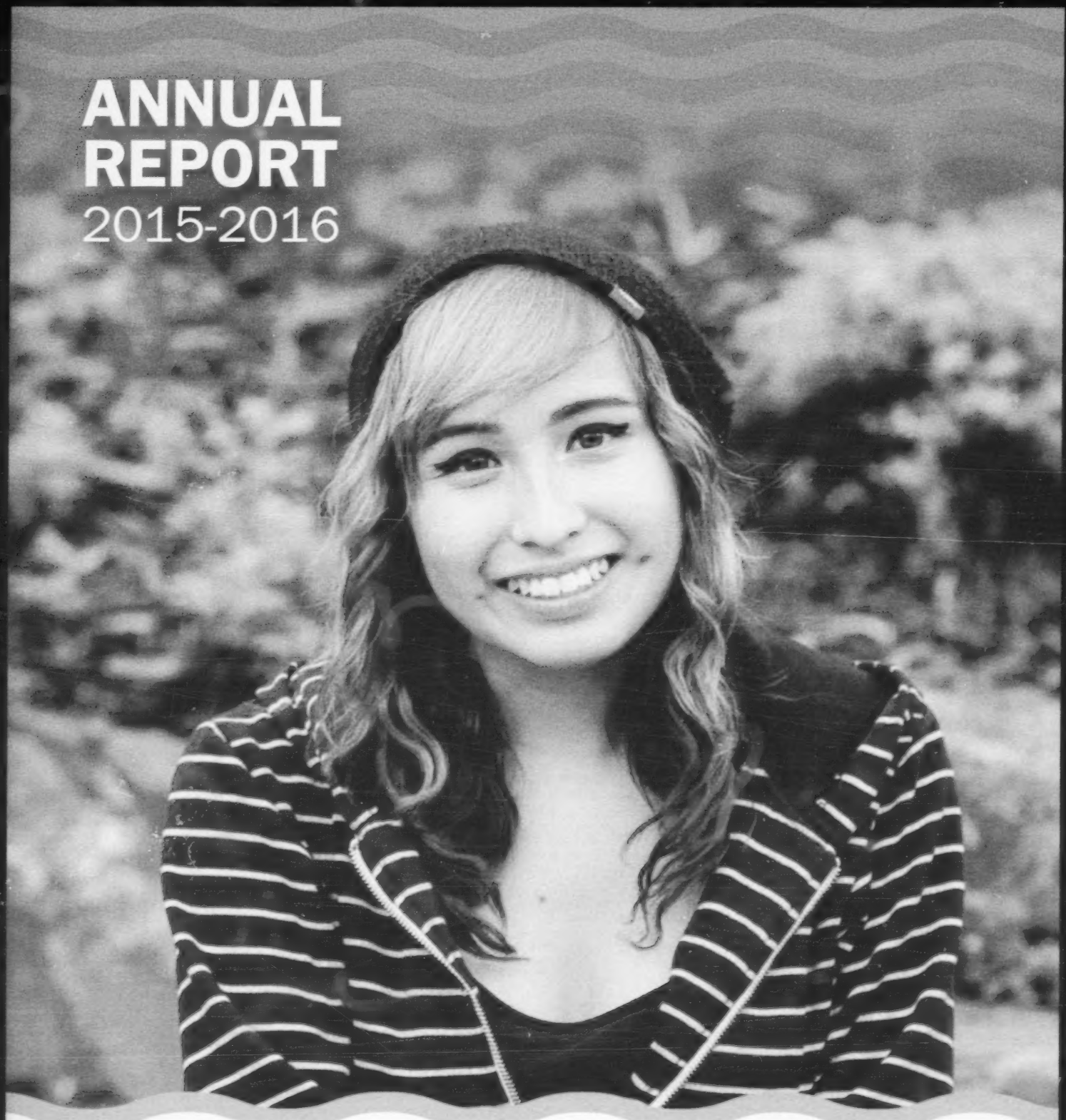
ANNUAL REPORT
2015-2016



ocya

OFFICE OF THE CHILD AND
YOUTH ADVOCATE ALBERTA

Photography in the 2015-2016 Annual Report provided by Curtis Comeau Photography. Shot on location in Banff, Alberta and the McClean Family Farm.

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
325 Legislature Building
10800 97 Avenue NW
Edmonton AB T5K 2B6

Dear Mr. Speaker:

It is my privilege to submit to you the 2015-2016 Annual Report of the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate.

The Report has been prepared in accordance with Section 21(1) of the *Child and Youth Advocate Act* and covers the activities of the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate for the period April 1, 2015 to March 31, 2016.

Respectfully,

[Original signed by Del Graff]

Del Graff
Child and Youth Advocate

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Message from the Advocate

Connections through relationships are among the most supportive things in the life of a young person.

Healthy and meaningful connections help children and youth develop emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. Connections with family and community help a young person learn about their identity and their culture, giving them anchors in a world that can present challenges and uncertainties. Meaningful connections with adults and mentors offer young people opportunities to explore, learn, experience, and aspire – helping position them for success down the road.

Having a strong connection can make all the difference when it comes to assisting a young person.

Recognizing this, many of the activities of the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate (OCYA) this year had an emphasis on strengthening connections through relationships.

We worked to strengthen connections between the OCYA and young people, so that more children and youth could benefit from our services. When we assisted young people, we ensured our relationships were genuine and fostered trust.

We worked to strengthen our connections with government systems in Alberta, including youth justice, health, and child welfare to share information and perspectives. Having a better understanding of their work positions the OCYA to advocate for meaningful change that can improve circumstances for young people in the province.

We worked to strengthen connections with stakeholders and the public, with the goal of raising awareness about the rights of children and youth and about the work of our office. These efforts empowered others to be champions of young people's rights, and provided opportunities for us to benefit from other people's perspectives.

We worked to further strengthen our connections with experts in child welfare and child development. These individuals and organizations help provide us with the knowledge we need so that we are well positioned to advance the rights of children and youth in Alberta.

Finally, we strengthened connections within and throughout our office. Each of us at the OCYA learns from our work; it enriches each individual, and helps lift up the organization as a whole.

In the coming year, the *Child and Youth Advocate Act* will be reviewed with input from young people, stakeholders, and the public. This provides an exciting opportunity to strengthen the efforts we make on behalf of young people and to better align our work with the hopes and expectations Albertans have for effective child advocacy in our Province.

With stronger connections, our office is in a better position to assist vulnerable children and youth in Alberta.

[Original signed by Del Graff]

Del Graff
Child and Youth Advocate

Our Vision

The rights, interests, and viewpoints of Alberta's vulnerable children and youth are affirmed and acted upon.

Our Mission

We represent the rights, interests, and viewpoints of Alberta children and youth who receive designated intervention services or who are involved with the youth justice system.

Office of the Child and Youth Advocate

Supporting Young People in Exercising and Securing Their Rights

Under Alberta's *Child and Youth Advocate Act*, the Child and Youth Advocate ("the Advocate") serves as an independent officer of the Alberta Legislature.

In support of fulfilling the Advocate's mandate, the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate (OCYA) works to advance the rights and serve the interests of young people who are receiving "designated services." This includes young people who:

- are receiving or attempting to access services under Alberta's *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* (the "*Enhancement Act*");
- are receiving services under Alberta's *Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act (PSECA)*; or
- are involved with the youth justice system.

The OCYA does this in several ways by:

- providing legal representation for young people in child intervention and *PSECA* court matters;
- facilitating public education and awareness-building about the rights of young people and the role of the OCYA in supporting the exercise of those rights;
- providing individual advocacy to young people involved with designated services;
- developing relationships with stakeholders, including the systems and organizations that provide services to and support young people;
- identifying systemic issues and making sound recommendations to improve designated services for young people;
- conducting investigations into systemic issues arising from a serious injury to or the death of a young person receiving designated services; and
- conducting research and reporting to Alberta's Legislature on matters concerning young people who are receiving designated services.

The OCYA provides an important "check and balance" on behalf of young people when government intervention has been necessary. For these young people, the Government of Alberta can be making significant decisions on their behalf, and it is of utmost importance that their rights are upheld, their voices are heard, and their interests are considered.

A hallmark of the OCYA's vision and mission is ensuring that young people understand their rights and have every reasonable opportunity to participate in decision-making that affects them.

The Organization

The work of the OCYA is organized into four divisions:

Advocacy Services / Systemic Advocacy, Evaluation and Research	**Investigations and Legal Representation**
Engagement and Education	**Strategic Support**

All of these divisions report to the Child and Youth Advocate.

About this Report

Each year the OCYA submits an Annual Report to the Speaker of the Alberta Legislative Assembly.

The 2015-2016 Annual Report highlights the major activities undertaken by the OCYA during the reporting period of April 1, 2015 through March 31, 2016, and outlines priorities for the year ahead.

Advocacy Services

Advocacy Services is responsible for representing the rights, interests, and viewpoints of young people who are receiving services under the *Enhancement Act* or the *PSECA*, and youth involved with the youth justice system.

Our advocacy work begins when a young person refers themselves to our office or is referred by a significant person in their life. We then determine whether the young person is currently receiving or wants to access designated services and whether they have an issue that indicates: their interests are not being considered; their rights are not being respected; their viewpoint is not being heard; or all relevant information about their needs has not been gathered or considered.

OCYA advocates take direction from young people whenever possible. Ideally, a young person guides how the advocate provides advocacy, including determining what information the advocate will access and from whom. When a young person is directing the advocacy, they may identify natural advocates they have in their lives such as family members, teachers, therapists or other meaningful adults. The relationships young people have with their natural advocates are important and respected so we strive to work collaboratively with these natural advocates, not replace them.

In cases where the young person is unable to direct advocacy efforts on their behalf (due to age or significant capacity issues), the advocate reviews the young person's circumstances and develops and implements a plan based on the young person's interests and viewpoints — not what someone else thinks are their "best interests."

OCYA advocates learn what is important to young people directly from the young person, and encourage and support them to express their viewpoints, their way of looking at a situation. By representing the young person's viewpoint, an advocate emphasizes the young person's right to participate actively in decisions being made about them and address their desires, hopes, fears, and concerns.

Advocates use their expertise to assist young people to understand and secure their rights. For young people who have had some of their fundamental rights impacted, such as leaving their family or losing their freedom while in custody, it is empowering to learn that they have the same rights as other young people. In addition to helping young people to exercise their rights, advocates work to raise awareness of the responsibilities of others about their responsibilities related to children's rights.

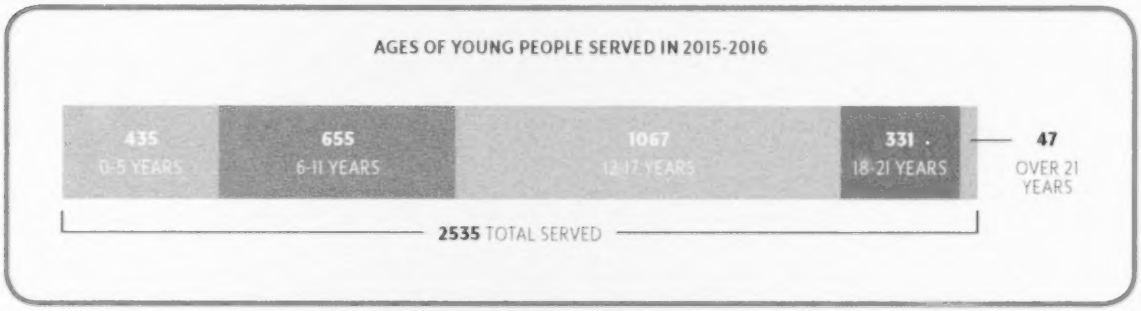
Sometimes advocates help young people with issues not related to the designated services they are receiving. For example, a young person may be told that an educational program is not available to them because of their circumstances. An OCYA advocate may be able to help the young person with this situation through representing their rights, interests, and viewpoints in this matter.

Key Activities in 2015-2016

Advocating for Young People

In 2015-2016, a total of 2,535 young people were served through screenings, information gathering, and working on advocacy issues with an advocate. This is consistent with the number of young people served during the previous year. While the number of young people served overall remained very much the same, there were changes in the age profile of those we served.

Young people aged 12-17 years remained the age group served most frequently, and their numbers increased by 6 per cent in 2015-2016. The number of young people aged 18 years and over continued to grow as well, increasing 13 per cent from the year prior. On the other hand, fewer young people under 12 years old were assisted by Advocacy Services during 2015-2016, particularly those 0-5 years old (a decrease of 12 per cent).



The number of Aboriginal young people who were served by Advocacy Services decreased by 4 per cent in 2015-2016, while the number of non-Aboriginal young people served increased by 7 per cent. Aboriginal young people currently represent 58 per cent of the young people served. This is consistent with Aboriginal representation in the total child intervention caseload for Alberta,[1] which stands at 59 per cent.

1 Children aged 0-17 years receiving Child Intervention Services both in care and not in care. Performance Analysis and Improvement Unit, Alberta Human Services. (2016). *Child Intervention information and statistics summary: 2015/16 Fourth quarter (March) update*. Edmonton, AB: Author. Retrieved from: http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/child-intervention-info-stats-summary-2015-16-q4.pdf

RACIAL ORIGIN OF YOUNG PEOPLE SERVED IN 2015-2016

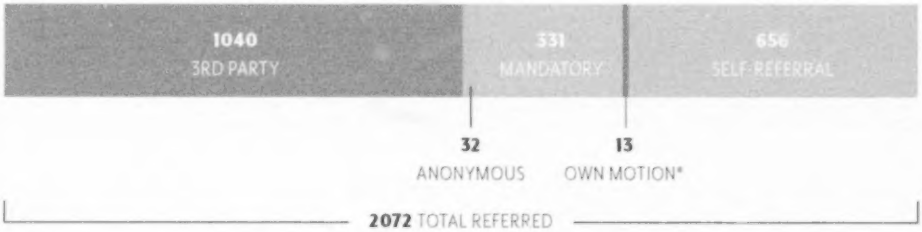
Aboriginal – young people who identify as First Nations, Inuit, Métis, "Non-Status," "potential to be registered," and "unknown Aboriginal group."

Non-Aboriginal – young people who are identified as other than Aboriginal.

There were 2072 young people referred to our office in 2015-2016. Referrals by third parties (such as parents, foster parents, school staff, caseworkers, and group home staff) continued to be the most common way that young people were referred during 2015-2016. Half of all young people referred during 2015-2016 were referred by third parties. **One third of the young people served in 2015-2016 referred themselves to our office, an increase of 17 per cent from the previous year.**

Young people can also be referred by way of mandatory notifications.[2] Caseworkers in Alberta's child intervention system are required to notify the OCYA and the Statutory Director[3] when certain situations arise. During 2015-2016, there were 10 per cent fewer mandatory notifications to Advocacy Services, compared to the previous year.

REFERRAL SOURCES OF YOUNG PEOPLE REFERRED IN 2015-2016



* Own motion referrals are those initiated by the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate.

Connecting with Experts to Better Serve Younger Children

During the past year, Advocacy Services took advantage of training opportunities and expert knowledge to help improve our work with younger children.

Our office hosted Dr. Karen Winter of Queen's University in Belfast, Northern Ireland, who provided training sessions on methods of communicating with younger children, and providing rights based advocacy with and for younger children. These sessions highlighted the benefits of recognizing the abilities of young children to be active agents in their lives, including improved self-esteem and social skills, and ensuring better informed decisions and planning.

Drawing on our learning and knowledge, Advocacy Services explored a number of techniques and strategies to support younger children to communicate with advocates in ways and means of their choosing. These included the use of art-based activities, and activities designed to assist young children to share their thoughts, wishes and feelings in a variety of mediums (audio, visual, written, etc.). Advocates are now applying these strategies in their work with young people through the use of engagement bins with art materials, games, and activities.

2 A mandatory notification must be made in the following situations: allegations of abuse in care; competing points of view; unmet needs; and, when a young person disagrees with a significant decision.

3 Statutory Director refers to the Director as per the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act*.

Contributing to Systemic Advocacy

OCYA advocates play a role in identifying systemic issues through their work with young people on individual matters. Since they help hundreds of children and youth each year, advocates are well positioned to identify patterns and trends that indicate the potential presence of system-wide issues. This year, OCYA advocates had a greater role in systemic advocacy work, taking a lead in organizing and participating in systemic advocacy activities. In the coming year, there will be further opportunities for advocates and others at the OCYA to be more involved in systemic advocacy work.

Looking Ahead

Advocacy Services will continue to explore ways to enhance the services we provide to younger children. As some younger children are unable to direct advocacy or provide feedback on the services they receive, it is important we take additional steps to effectively assist these children.

We will continue work on strengthening our relationships with stakeholders and further developing our knowledge of cultural groups. In the year ahead, OCYA advocates are planning to attend cultural camps, ceremonies, and other community events. Working with others is a big part of advocacy and through strong connections we are better able to help improve circumstances for young people.

Our shift to a more rights-based approach to advocacy will continue in the coming year. We have more to learn about rights and to incorporate this knowledge into our practice. As is often the case with any shift in practice, this will take time.

We will be reviewing the services we provide to young people to determine the extent to which our Advocacy Practice Framework[4] principles are reflected in our advocacy. All the work of our office should be guided by the six principles in the Framework. In the coming year, we will be monitoring practice and providing direction that will support improvements and new approaches.

...**Jackie Astle**, Program Manager of Advancing Futures Bursary, a post-secondary bursary program for youth aged 18 to 24 who have been in government care, which mentors students through their transition out of care into post-secondary education and helps fund their studies.

Jackie is appreciated for her advocacy efforts on behalf of young people applying to the Advancing Futures Bursary program, and for her support of program staff in connecting them to the right educational institutions and their career goals. Jackie goes the extra mile and makes "human decisions" to provide young people every opportunity to complete their post-secondary studies.

4 The Advocacy Practice Framework is located on our website at http://www.ocya.alberta.ca/adult/what-we-do/overview/

Systemic Advocacy

Systemic advocacy means working towards broad changes that will benefit young people now and into the future. The OCYA's systemic advocacy efforts help improve circumstances for young people who are receiving services from Alberta's child intervention system, justice, and other government systems.

The OCYA involves young people in its advocacy efforts wherever possible. This is consistent with the recognition that young people have the right to participate in decisions which impact them, and that better decisions are made when young people are active participants in the process. Young people's voices can be powerful in delivering messages to key decision-makers when they are able to speak first-hand about the impacts of government policies and services on their lives.

During the past year, the OCYA also learned a great deal from organizations dedicated to the advancement of various cultural groups. Strengthening these community connections helped enhance the knowledge base of OCYA staff, which in turn strengthened our effectiveness in helping young people in Alberta.

"Without the Child and Youth Advocate, vulnerable children in Alberta would lack a voice. The Advocate allows their voice to be heard where it matters – from case workers through to policy makers." - Dr. Peter Choate, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Social Work, Mount Royal University

Key Activities in 2015-2016

Speaking Up About Issues Affecting Young People

Throughout the year, the Child and Youth Advocate spoke through both traditional media and social media to raise public awareness about issues affecting young people. This was sometimes done in conjunction with the Canadian Council for Child and Youth Advocates (CCCYA), of which the Alberta Child and Youth Advocate is a member.

Notable activities included the following:

- In May 2015, the Advocate drew attention to the disproportionately high level of representation of Aboriginal children and youth in Alberta's child welfare system. The Advocate announced the OCYA would be undertaking a Special Report to examine this challenge.
- In June 2015, the Advocate and other CCCYA members attended The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) closing events in Ottawa and presented a Declaration of Reconciliation at the Actions of Reconciliation session.
- In July 2015, the CCCYA issued a news release addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal children involved in child welfare systems in Canada, calling on Premiers and the federal government to take concrete actions and to immediately engage children and youth in the dialogue about their future and their needs. This again drew attention to the issue of Aboriginal representation in Alberta's child welfare system.
- In January 2016, the Child and Youth Advocate issued a news release supporting a decision made by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal regarding child welfare funding for First Nations. This drew attention to the inequitable funding that First Nations children in care have received across Canada and in Alberta, and urged governments to take action.

"The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate serves some of the most vulnerable and at-risk children and youth in the province. At a case level, Advocates make a genuine difference for each child and youth that they serve. Many of these stories have common themes however, calling for a deeper examination of the systemic issues at play and the relative impact of structural, jurisdictional, and service factors on the lives of these young people. It takes an extended professional community to truly advocate for children and youth at risk.

The OCYA has developed meaningful partnerships with the best experts in the country as they drill into systemic issues including: Aboriginal youth suicide, parental substance abuse, parental mental health concerns, developmental disabilities, and the relative merits of kin versus non-kin placements." - Bruce MacLaurin, MSW, PhD (cand), Assistant Professor, Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary

Reporting on Systemic Issues

A key part of the OCYA's systemic advocacy efforts is the research and publication of reports that highlight issues in Alberta's child welfare system. During 2015-2016, the OCYA completed eight Investigative Reviews.

The OCYA investigates systemic issues arising from the serious injury or death of children who received designated services at the time of the incident or within two years of their injury or death. Through our Investigative Review process, recommendations are made to address systemic issues in an effort to bring about changes that will enhance the health, safety, and well-being of young people.

Substantial work was also undertaken on a Special Report regarding the over-representation of Aboriginal children in Alberta's child welfare system. On occasion, the OCYA will undertake Special Reports that examine in depth, the specific issues pertaining to young people who have involvement with Alberta's child welfare and youth justice systems.

Connecting People with Knowledge

One way the OCYA advocates on systemic issues is through learning events. An emerging issue concerning the rights of youth affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) prompted the OCYA to organize a two-day FASD learning event that took place in January 2016. Led by Dr. Jacqueline Pei and her colleagues from the University of Alberta, over 40 representatives from the Ministry of Human Services, the Delegated First Nation Agencies, and OCYA staff attended.

As part of the event, Dr. Pei explored new research and different approaches to working with FASD-affected people that respects their right to participate in meetings and decision-making processes. In the wake of this learning event, the OCYA is already observing changes in attitudes and ways of working with FASD-affected youth.

Advocating on Children's Mental Health

In June 2015, the Government of Alberta announced that a review of Alberta's mental health policy would be undertaken. The Child and Youth Advocate, along with two young people, presented and provided a written submission to the Mental Health Review Committee in October 2015.

Our involvement with young people provides us with a unique perspective on the mental health issues that affect children and youth. This is especially true since most of the young people we work with have multiple needs, often as a result of exposure to a variety of stressors or adverse life experiences.

Other ways we have become informed is through reviewing research and looking at the abundance of information and recommendations that exists on children's mental health in Alberta. Many of our office's reports offer recommendations on mental health and identify system improvements that can be made.

Our work in this area sometimes involves partnering with others. For instance, we have previously collaborated with the Mental Health Patient Advocate and the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research to facilitate two events in which young people and over 100 leaders from across the province participated. These events not only provided an opportunity to plan and report back on calls to action, but also provided an opportunity to learn about training and research initiatives from others.

The advice we provided to the Government through our submission to the Mental Health Review Committee was based on our experiences with young people, what we have learned from others and through our partnerships, and by keeping informed of what is happening on children's mental health in Alberta.

A link to the Advocate's submission to the Mental Health Review Committee can be found at:
http://www.ocya.alberta.ca/adult/publications/other-ocya-reports/

Engaging with Youth in the Justice System

Advocates regularly visit Alberta's young offender centres to provide information to youth about their rights and about the work of the OCYA. Youth also have the opportunity to meet with an advocate privately outside of these information sessions.

On occasion, the OCYA has met with youth in custody to discuss systemic issues that have broad impacts, and have followed-up on the issues these young people raised. As one example, OCYA staff met with youth and officials from Alberta Justice following the announced changes to the services, units, and programs of the Calgary Young Offenders Centre.

To better inform youth involved with the youth justice system, we developed a pamphlet about ways an advocate can provide support to them and that highlights some of their rights. This pamphlet has been widely distributed to youth justice facilities and programs throughout the province.

The OCYA is concerned about our ability to access youth in the youth justice system, and is currently pursuing this matter with the Ministry of Alberta Justice and Solicitor General.

Connecting with Community Organizations

The OCYA's systemic advocacy work often involves developing relationships and partnering with stakeholders, such as community-based organizations who also serve young people. By cultivating strong connections with other organizations, the OCYA is better able to identify emerging issues, connect with new research and thinking about children and youth, and develop allies who can help advocate on systemic issues.

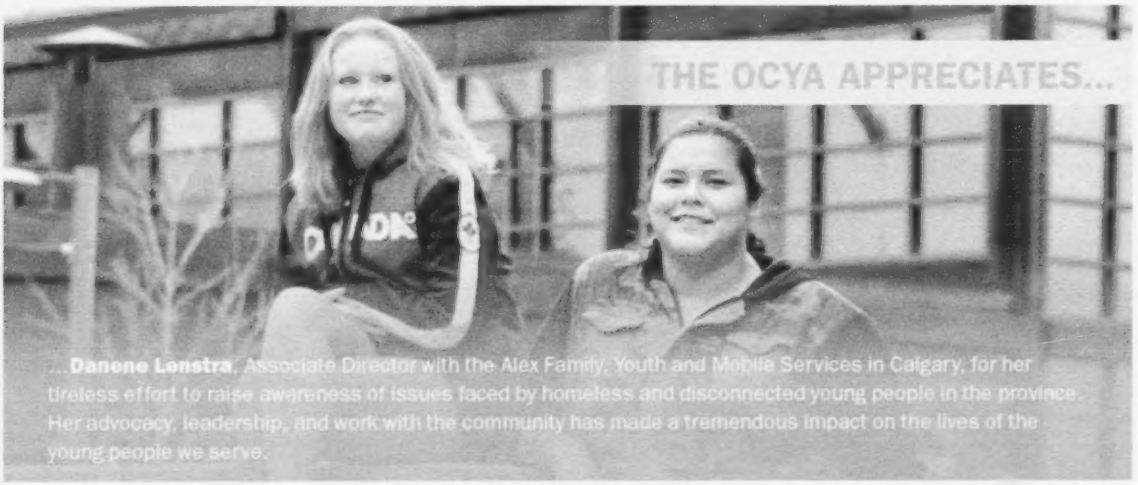
In 2015-2016, the OCYA partnered with the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights, to benefit from their expertise in rights-based systemic advocacy. This partnership has produced a systemic advocacy process that will be piloted in 2016-2017. A key foundation of that process is a belief that systemic advocacy work is best done in collaboration with others. A number of Systemic Advocacy Issues Teams will be formed, each comprised of representatives from across the OCYA who will work together towards improving circumstances for young people on an identified issue.

The OCYA also worked with the Ministry of Human Services and the Centre for Race and Culture on issues facing newcomers to Canada. Issues for newcomers can often be complex. The OCYA was invited to provide input into training that was in development, with assistance from the Centre for Race and Culture, on working with multicultural families. The OCYA later contracted with the Centre for Race and Culture to provide OCYA staff with Effective Intercultural training, to strengthen our knowledge and practice skills in working with newcomer children and youth.

Focusing on Sexual and Gender Minority Youth

We focused attention this year on issues facing sexual and gender minority youth, by engaging in several activities:

- In May 2015, our office collaborated with other stakeholders to present a "Working with Sexual and Gender Minority Youth" workshop to Edmonton members of the Alberta College of Social Workers.
- In June 2015, OCYA staff hosted an activity/information booth at Queer Prom Edmonton, an event attended by over 400 young people. This offered an opportunity for the OCYA to build relationships with young people and other youth-serving agencies that attended the event.
- In June 2015, OCYA staff and young people attended the Mayor's Pride Brunch in Edmonton, and in September 2015, OCYA staff and young people from our south office attended the Premier's Pride Brunch in Calgary.
- In September 2015, through endorsement by the Advocate, Dr. Kristopher Wells spoke at the biennial CCCYA National Conference in St. John's, Newfoundland. Dr. Wells is the Faculty Director and Assistant Professor for the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services (iSMSS) in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta. The OCYA also commissioned a report by iSMSS to examine our practices in serving sexual and gender minority youth, which provided excellent recommendations for the OCYA to consider.


THE OCYA APPRECIATES...
...**Danene Lenstra**, Associate Director with the Alex Family, Youth and Mobile Services in Calgary, for her tireless effort to raise awareness of issues faced by homeless and disconnected young people in the province. Her advocacy, leadership, and work with the community has made a tremendous impact on the lives of the young people we serve.

Identifying Issues at the Regional and Agency Level

The OCYA identifies systemic issues at the regional and agency level through Service Reports, which are completed on a semi-annual basis. A Service Report is provided to each Child and Family Service (CFS) region and each Delegated First Nation Agency[5] (DFNA) in the province. The reports summarize activities that the OCYA has had with young people and stakeholders from each CFS and DFNA jurisdiction, and identifies potential systemic issues. Some issues are concentrated in one or two jurisdictions, while other issues are common to many Alberta communities, First Nation communities or Métis settlements.

Staff of the OCYA meet with representatives of each CFS and DFNA, and the Ministry of Human Services, to discuss the Service Reports and the systemic issues they identify.
The Service Reports are also published on the OCYA's website.

Some of the systemic issues identified during 2015-2016 include:

- **THE USE OF RESTRAINT AND SECLUSION IN RESIDENTIAL CARE**
- **ISSUES FOR NEWCOMERS TO CANADA**
- **HOMELESSNESS AND LACK OF APPROPRIATE PLACEMENTS**
- **ISSUES CONCERNING PERMANENCY PLANNING**
- **YOUNG PEOPLE PLACED OUTSIDE THEIR HOME COMMUNITIES AND AWAY FROM FAMILY**
- **LACK OF SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE RETURNING HOME TO THEIR PARENTS**
- **LACK OF SUPPORT FROM CASEWORKERS TO YOUTH IN CUSTODY**

Looking Ahead

In the coming year, we will be continuing our partnership with the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights, and continue work on piloting a systemic advocacy process. What we learn from this pilot will be used to develop and implement a comprehensive process for systemic advocacy.

Another area of focus will be the development and implementation of an Inclusivity and Diversity Plan for the OCYA. The intent of this plan will be to strengthen the OCYA's work with sexual and gender minority children and youth.

We will continue to look for opportunities to speak up on behalf of and with young people on issues that matter to them. Systemic advocacy is more effective when it is fresh and relevant. To that end, we will continue to explore creative and innovative ways to address systemic issues that are identified and brought to our attention.

5 The province has given delegations of authority under the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* necessary to enable First Nations agencies to provide the full range of provincial Child Intervention Services within their geographic boundaries. Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) funds the agencies for the provision of Child Intervention Service on-reserve.

Staff Reflections

"How are connections important for your work at the OCYA?"

HEATHER RITCHIE

Advocate

I am fortunate to spend a large part of my day outside of the office meeting with spirited, strong, and resilient young people. When they are receiving services from large government systems, and decisions are being made outside of their families, things can become complicated and connections can become altered or otherwise tenuous.

I once heard connection being described as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment. Meaningful connection is necessary for all of us to trust, grow, and feel respected. Each young person, whether they are really young or a teenager, has their own hopes and dreams and can identify those they hold closest to their hearts.

In my work I hope to create a connection with each young person through learning and listening to who they are and what is important to them, without adding my own influence or bias. What they may need in an Advocate can vary greatly and I do my best to adapt by changing my style or approach to be as useful as I can be for each child or youth. If my personality or the way I work isn't a good fit for a young person and we can't figure out a way to resolve this, then I'll work with another Advocate so that a valuable connection can be made for the young person.

I strongly believe that young people are thoughtful, infinitely capable, and are the experts in regards to what is happening in their own lives.

CATHY BOWLEY

Intake Services Team Lead

I feel honored to be the first point of contact for vulnerable youth, their caregivers, and stakeholders – the first call is where the connection begins. I have been with Intake Services at the OCYA for almost nine years; first as an Intake Worker, and now as the Intake Services Supervisor. I genuinely love my job and am humbled by the young people that phone in to ask for help. Most often these young people are in difficult situations and don't feel that their voices are being heard. They feel alone. I often think about a quote my father, who taught me the importance of bringing people together, lived by: "Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much." (Helen Keller)

When I receive a call, I try to establish an immediate connection by being friendly, empathetic, and respectful. I try to be the person that I would want to talk to if I needed help. Together, the young person and I try to determine whether they need an Advocate, an LRCY lawyer or a community resource to help them get their rights, viewpoints, and interests heard. I always think of Intake Services as an island. My job is to build bridges from that island to other parts of the OCYA and the community at large. By strengthening those connections I'm able to help put a youth in touch with the supports they need.

The more connections a youth has, the more resources they can access, the less alone they will feel, and the more successful they can be. It all starts with a phone call.

ED GARRICK

Investigator

In living my own life and watching those around me, I see how chaotic and random life can be. Sometimes life is calm. Other times things happen where you feel powerless and wonder how you will get through it. This can feel scary or even traumatic. Many of the young people we meet are searching for stability or safety in their lives. At one time or another, we may feel consumed by the chaos in our lives and want to give up relying on anything or anyone.

What I believe matters most is the people I meet and the experiences I've shared with them, during good times and challenging times. These people can be family, friends or even strangers. Young people have helped show me that these connections to others anchor us through life's challenges and give it meaning. I wonder if we would all benefit from working harder to stay in touch with one another. Technology is a great way to stay connected but I don't think it can replace the times we are actually with each other.

Some connections in my life are active while others are now memories that I cherish. They are a big part of who I am. I look forward to experiencing life each day, with people I know and with those I have yet to meet.

KENDRA PHELPS

Research Specialist

When people ask me what I do, they sometimes assume that as a Research Specialist, I have one of the duller jobs at the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate. They imagine someone sitting in isolation crunching numbers or reading dry, academic research papers. While those things are part of what I do, I try to explain that it's really about so much more than that.

In order to produce accurate, high-quality information, I think it's important to work with others and be connected to those around me – both inside and outside the OCYA. It's those connections that give my work meaning and shape what I do. In turn, the information that I produce helps to make connections for others. The information and reports produced by the OCYA are much more powerful when we can bring together the voices of young people with high quality research that reinforces what they have to say.

It's inspiring to work in a place where research can be used to help advocate for young people. We all work towards that same end goal here – we each just do it a little bit differently. By connecting all of the different areas of the office we're pulling together all of the tools that we can use to help young people most effectively. Research is one of those tools.

In the end, research may be what I do, but it isn't really my focus. My focus is on young people and furthering their interests. That focus is why I come to work every day with a passion for what I do. It's rewarding to know that the research and information I provide can make a real difference, and that's what motivates me. My job is anything but dull.

"Advocates will help you talk to the adults." – Youth

"My youth advocate helped and supported me in getting my voice heard. My concerns were being heard by the decision makers and the people with power. Without the support and encouragement of my advocate I would never of had the courage and support to speak out for myself." – Youth

"...now I have a voice that I'm not scared to use anymore thank you again hai hai" – Youth

"What I think, what I feel and what I say is important at the Advocate's office." – Youth

"Advocates listen to what you have to say." – Youth

"My advocate helped me a lot with everything since I got here. She helped me get visits with my family. This makes me very happy; I did not have visits for the month I was here." – Youth

"Once I started working with you and your office it was so different. The advocate is so genuine and pure. I could really tell and feel you are there just for kids, and you were on my team. Now I want to make that difference for kids too." – Youth

Investigations

The OCYA investigates circumstances where young people involved with certain government systems have died or been seriously injured.[6]

Under section 9(2)(d) of the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*, the Advocate has the authority to "investigate systemic issues arising from a serious injury to or the death of a child who was receiving a designated service at the time of the injury or death, if, in the opinion of the Advocate, the investigation is warranted or in the public interest." For investigations, a "designated service" includes:

- services under the *Enhancement Act* (with the exception of adoptions);
- services under the *PSECA*; and
- services provided to young people through the youth justice system if the young person was in open or closed custody at the time of the serious injury or death.

In 2014, the OCYA's mandate was expanded to include a review of the circumstances of young people who had received Child Intervention Services (with the exception of adoptions) within two years of their death.

The OCYA fulfills this mandate through the use of Investigative Reviews. The Investigative Review process is extensive, consisting of three phases: the Examination phase; the Assessment phase; and, the Investigative Review phase.

All serious injuries and deaths reported to the OCYA are reviewed in the Examination phase. An OCYA investigator reviews the report of serious injury or death, along with any electronic records. Following contact with someone close to the young person, if a systemic issue(s) is not identified, the review process stops here. If a potential systemic issue(s) is identified, a further review will occur in the Assessment Phase.

6 A serious injury is defined as a life threatening injury to the child or an injury that may cause significant impairment to the child's health.

In the Assessment Phase, the investigator reviews the information provided in the Examination Phase and examines additional information, including information from existing records of public bodies. Following contact with someone close to the young person, if a potential systemic issue(s) is not identified, the review process stops here. If a potential systemic issue(s) is identified and it is in the public interest to review the matter further, an Investigative Review will occur.

In the Investigative Review phase, further information is gathered by looking at additional information, interviewing individuals familiar with the young person, examining best practices, consulting with the Child and Family Services Council for Quality Assurance, and engaging a panel of subject matter experts. Recommendations to improve services for children and families may be made. An Investigative Review report is completed and made public. Investigative Review reports must not provide any identifying information about the child and their family. All names used in Investigative Review reports are pseudonyms.

A copy of the Investigations Process for Serious Injury or Death: Child Intervention Services is available on the OCYA website at: http://www.ocya.alberta.ca/adult/what-we-do/investigations/.

Fundamentally, an Investigative Review is about learning lessons, not assigning blame. It is not about assigning legal responsibilities nor does it replace or prevent other processes that may occur around a young person's injury or death, such as a fatality inquiry or criminal investigation.

An Investigative Review makes findings about the services that were provided to the young person, and makes recommendations that may help prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future. Through an Investigative Review, the OCYA advocates for system improvements that will help enhance the overall safety and well-being of children and youth who are receiving designated services.

THE OCYA APPRECIATES...

...the **Lethbridge Youth team**, a specialized unit within Children's Services that provides a youth-friendly atmosphere which focuses on frequent communication and involvement to nourish a strong relationship-based approach with youth. This team consists of generalist caseworkers who work with youth from intake until the youth transitions into adulthood. The practice is based on an all-inclusive team concept as the youth are encouraged to access anyone in the team as the need arises. The workers focus on the individual needs of each youth and provide housing support, educational advocacy, harm reduction strategies, birth control, sexual health education, safety planning, and ongoing emotional support as they journey into their own unique independence. There is a strong focus on listening to the youth's voice and assisting the youth to develop their own natural support network through connections to other community resources. In addition, the team has a TRAC Youth Outreach worker who can provide transportation to medical appointments, food bank access, housing supports, educational advocacy, sexual health appointments, harm reduction and one-to-one support as needed.

The physical environment is unique as the office space is separate from the main Children's Services reception area and provides access to a TV sitting area and food, should the youth need a space to be safe.

Key Activities in 2015-2016

Enhancing our Investigation Process

During the past year, we undertook several activities aimed at enhancing our investigation processes. These will help strengthen our capacity and effectiveness.

- In April 2015, the OCYA finalized its Investigative Review Policy.[7] This policy guides our review processes, helping ensure there is transparency and consistency in our investigative work.
- We connected with investigations staff from the offices of other provincial advocates in Canada, to learn how their work is similar or different from that of the OCYA. The information exchanged in these conversations has helped to improve the quality of our reviews.
- The development of a new Investigations Information System moved to implementation on April 1, 2015. In addition to enabling consistent tracking of investigations, the new system has enhanced our ability to identify issues and generate statistics for analysis.
- The Investigations division increased its staffing to include an additional investigator (for a full complement of seven), an investigations manager, and an analyst. This capacity enhancement has better positioned the division to strengthen our Investigative Review process.
- The Advocate has received feedback that there is some concern with the wording of recommendations in Investigative Reviews because they are not easily measured. In February 2016, OCYA staff who are involved in writing reports participated in a training session to help ensure recommendations are written in meaningful, clear, and concise ways. While recommendations will indicate outcomes the OCYA believes should be achieved to make situations better for young people, they will typically not speak to how these outcomes ought to be achieved. The Advocate believes that Government of Alberta ministries are each in the best position to determine how to implement OCYA recommendations.
- OCYA Investigations staff met with a number of Child and Family Services regions and Delegated First Nation Agencies (DFNAs). In addition to strengthening our connections with these organizations, the meetings offered opportunities to raise awareness among frontline child intervention staff and stakeholders about the Investigative Review process. The process of an Investigative Review can be difficult for frontline workers, since it evokes strong memories and emotions about the children and youth involved. Knowing what to expect from the Investigative Review process can help make the process less challenging.

Encouraging Improvements Through Investigative Reviews

Between April 1, 2015 and March 31, 2016, the OCYA completed eight Investigative Review reports,[8] including *Toward a Better Tomorrow: Addressing the Challenge of Aboriginal Youth Suicide*,[9] which examined the stories of seven young Aboriginal people who tragically took their own lives. Below is a brief summary of each of these Investigative Reviews.

7 A copy of the OCYA Investigative Review Policy Manual is located at http://www.ocya.alberta.ca/adult/publications/policy-manuals/.

8 In addition to the eight reports that were completed, the OCYA also released one report, *16-Year-Old Sam*, which was completed in the previous reporting period but was not included in last year's Annual Report.

9 This report was completed in March 2016, but was released April 2016.

16-Year-Old Sam: Serious Injury[10]

Sam was found unconscious after attempting suicide in a residential facility. He sustained life threatening injuries that resulted in lasting impairments to his health. Sam cannot walk independently; he has the use of only one arm and his speech and memory are impaired. At the time of his injury, Sam was the subject of a Permanent Guardianship Order (PGO).[11] Sam's circumstances raised questions about the need for earlier intervention with families, the importance of relationships, and the need for ongoing suicide risk assessment.

9-Year-Old Bonita: Serious Injury

Bonita was taken to hospital suffering from septic shock caused by severe untreated dental abscesses and malnutrition. She required surgery and was hospitalized for about two months. Her injuries were life threatening and she will require plastic surgery as she gets older. At the time of her injury, Bonita was in her parents' care and Child Intervention Services[12] was working with her family. Bonita's circumstances illuminated the significant issues of poverty and neglect that many children and families experience.

Six-Week-Old Nicole

Baby Nicole fell asleep on her father's chest and when he woke the next morning she was not breathing. At the time of her death, her family was receiving support from Child Intervention Services through an Enhancement Agreement.[13] Nicole's father was a young parent who was solely responsible for his very young twins. Though he had some learning and cognitive challenges, he loved his children and was trying to provide for their needs in the best ways he could. This review identified opportunities for child-serving systems to strengthen how they work with parents with unique needs so that Alberta's children and families are better supported.

8-Year-Old Ella

Ella passed away from an overdose of sleeping medication. She was in the care of Child Intervention Services and living in a group home when she died. She had severe global developmental delays and was on a number of medications. Although there was a police investigation and an autopsy, how Ella came to have a toxic level of sleeping medication in her system remains uncertain. Ella's circumstances raised questions about the need for improved awareness of existing protocols within the child intervention system, the availability of placements capable of providing the level of care required by children with complex needs, and medication management for children in care.

17-Year-Old Catherine

Catherine was found deceased near her family home. She had died by suicide. Catherine received mental health services from the time she was 10 years old. She was briefly involved with Child Intervention Services before she passed away. Her circumstances raised questions about the access young people have to mental health services, the scope of mental health interventions, and how systems work together to keep children safe.

10 Completed in March 2015, but released in May 2015.

11 The Director is the sole guardian of the child.

12 Child Intervention Services were provided by a Delegated First Nation Agency (DFNA).

13 A voluntary agreement between Child Intervention Services and a child's guardian intended to address protection concerns while the child remains in the guardian's care.

Two-Year-Old Teanna: Serious Injury

Teanna suffered significant physical and emotional trauma while placed in a foster home. She was hospitalized for a potentially life-threatening internal injury. Her foster mother was subsequently charged with assault. Teanna does not appear to have long-term physical impairment from her injuries, but she suffers from emotional trauma that includes nightmares. Her situation raised questions about child intervention case planning and alternate caregivers' capacity to meet the needs of children placed in their care.

17-Year-Old Makayla: Serious Injury

Makayla was seriously injured when she attempted suicide. She had significant involvement with Child Intervention Services and was first removed from her parents' care when she was about seven years old. When she was only 12 years old there were extended periods of time when her whereabouts were unknown. She had over 20 placements by the time she was 17 years old. Makayla's circumstances highlight the importance of stable relationships for young people.

10-Month-Old Lily

Lily drowned in a container of homemade alcohol while in her mother's care. Her family was receiving Child Intervention Services when she passed away. Lily's review identified the imminent and ongoing impact parental addictions have on children's safety.

Toward a Better Tomorrow: Addressing the Challenge of Aboriginal Youth Suicide

Over 18 months between June 2013 and December 2014, seven Aboriginal young people from different communities died by suicide:

- 14-Year-Old Asinay
- 15-Year-Old Sage
- 18-Year-Old Cedar
- 15-Year-Old Morley
- 15-Year-Old Kari
- 15-Year-Old Victoria
- 18-Year-Old Jacob

Their stories are tragic. All seven experienced early childhood trauma, exposure to domestic violence, parental addictions, and/or mental health problems. Many experienced the death of a family member by suicide. All were impacted by family disruption and the legacy of residential schools.

Within the Aboriginal youth population, suicide is one of the leading causes of death. The suicide rate among First Nations male youth is five times higher, and among First Nations female youth it is seven times higher, compared to their non-Aboriginal peers.[14]

The circumstances of these seven young people highlighted the need for community-led Aboriginal youth suicide strategies; the importance of addressing Aboriginal youth suicide holistically – physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually; and, the need to build protective factors in young people – those conditions that promote social, physical, emotional and psychological health and well-being.

Each of these reports is available on the OCYA's website. A summary of the findings and recommendations in these reports is provided in Appendix A.

14 Statistics Canada. (2013). Aboriginal peoples in Canada: First Nations people, Métis and Inuit. National Household Survey 2011. Ottawa, ON: Author. Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-011-x/99-011-x2011001-eng.cfm.

Some of the Investigative Reviews completed this year contained recommendations that addressed issues beyond the responsibility of the Ministry of Human Services. Accordingly, the OCYA worked to strengthen its connections with other Ministries – notably Health, Education, and Indigenous Relations – to raise understanding about the OCYA's role and provide context for its recommendations. By developing these connections across the Government of Alberta, the OCYA can better ensure that its recommendations will help bring about meaningful changes for Alberta's most vulnerable children.

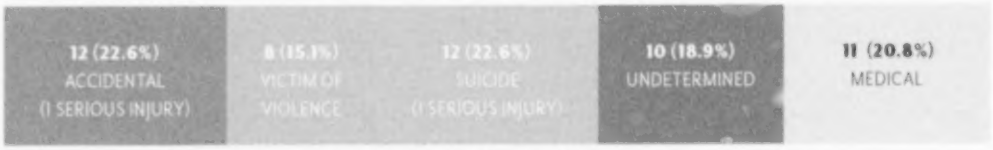
The OCYA's Response to Reports of Serious Injury or Death Received in 2015-2016

Reports of serious injury or death carried forward from 2014-2015 reporting period (as of April 1, 2015):	**45**
Closed in 2015-2016 at Examination	6
Closed in 2015-2016 at Assessment	14
Completed Investigative Review in 2015-2016	14
Remain in Investigative Review Phase (Carried Over to 2016-2017)	11
Reports of serious injury or death received during 2015-2016 reporting period:	**53**
Serious injuries	2
Deaths – occurred while receiving designated services	22
Deaths – within two years of receiving Child Intervention Services	29
OCYA activities in response to reports received during 2015-2016 period (as of March 31, 2016):	**53**
Closed After Examination	33
Closed After Assessment	8
Proceeded to Full Investigative Review	1
At Examination Phase	1
At Assessment Phase	10
Total reports addressed during 2015-2016:	**98**
Closed during the period	75
Remaining in progress as of March 31, 2016	23

"The quality and depth of the Investigative Reviews performed by the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate continues to impress; in the past year none more so than the report entitled, *Toward a Better Tomorrow*. The composite review of the deaths by suicide of seven Aboriginal youth speaks to the added value of this work, providing an opportunity for recommendations which are truly system-wide." - Lionel Dibden, MB BCh, FRCP(C), Associate Professor, Department of Paediatrics, University of Alberta

Breakdown of 53 Reports of Serious Injuries and Deaths Reported to the OCYA in 2015-2016

TYPE OF INCIDENT (DEATH AND SERIOUS INJURY)



53 (100%) TOTAL REFERRED

Accidental - refers to serious injury or death related to motor vehicle accidents, accidental overdoses, household accidents, house fires, etc.

Victim of Violence - refers to serious injury or death where the young person has been injured by another person.

Suicide - refers to deaths that occur when an individual dies as a result of a self-inflicted injury where evidence indicates the person intended to cause their own death.

Undetermined - refers to deaths that the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner have identified as undetermined or where the manner or cause of death is still under review. Also includes deaths previously categorized as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

Medical - refers to serious injury or death related to chronic or acute illness.

Serious Injury - refers to injuries that were considered life-threatening or may have caused significant impairment to the child's health.

STATUS OF INVOLVEMENT WITH DESIGNATED SERVICE

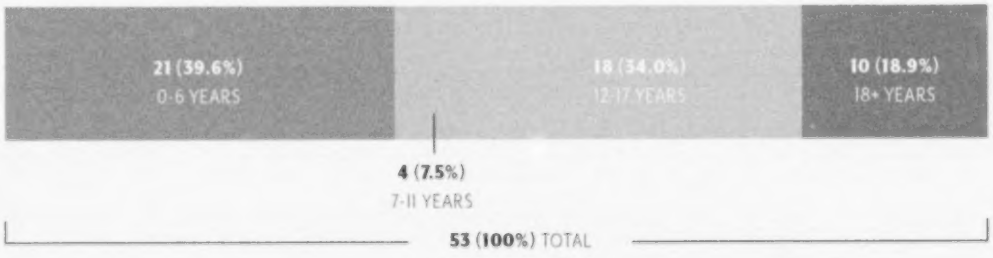
53 (100%) TOTAL

In Care - the young person was in the care of Child Intervention Services.

Receiving Services - the young person was receiving services under the *Enhancement Act* or *PSECA* but not in care.

Previous Involvement - the young person had involvement with Child Intervention Services within two years of their death.

AGE RANGE



53 (100%) TOTAL

ABORIGINAL STATUS

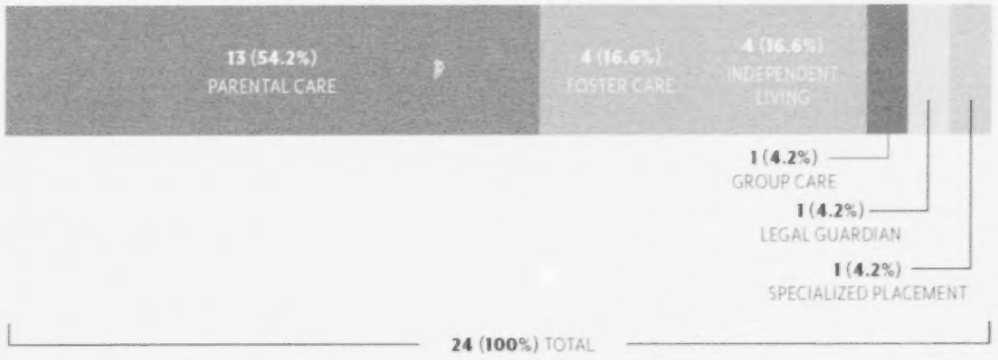
Aboriginal - young people who identify as First Nations, Inuit, Métis, "Non-Status," "potential to be registered," and "unknown Aboriginal group."

Non-Aboriginal - young people who are identified as other than Aboriginal.

Placements for Young People

PLACEMENTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Of the 53 reports of serious injuries and deaths reported to the OCYA: 24 young people were receiving Child Intervention Services when they were seriously injured or died; and 29 young people had received services within two years of their death or serious injury. The following is a summary of the 24 placements at the time of the incident:



Parental Care - the young person is in the care and custody of his or her parent(s). The parent makes all the decisions about the child. Child Intervention Services provides supports and services to the child and family, when/if required.

Foster Care - a placement in a licensed home or facility under the *Enhancement Act* that provides care to children/youth receiving Child Intervention Services.

Independent Living - a living situation where the young person has formal supports (Supported Independent Living) or those situations where they are living on their own and may be receiving some financial supports.

Group Care - a residential placement staffed by childcare workers that provides care for a child receiving Child Intervention Services.

Legal Guardian - a third party has obtained guardianship of the child through the court system. The legal guardian makes all decisions about the child, including education, health care, cultural or religious upbringing, and where the child will live. Child Intervention Services is involved in providing supports and services to the child and family, when/if required.

Specialized Placement - individual specialized placement for a child with high medical needs.

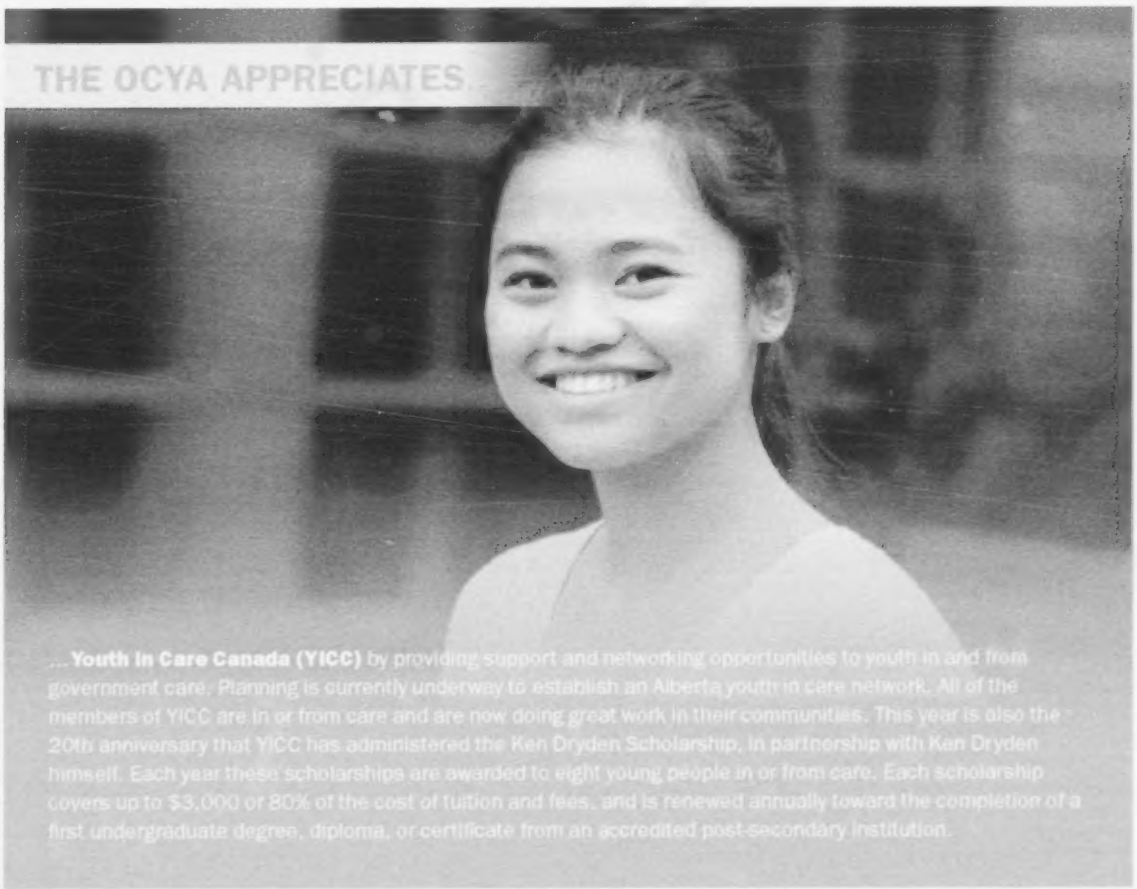
Looking Ahead

The Investigations division continues to address the high number of reports it received during the previous reporting period (2014-2015) as a result of the Government of Alberta's expansion of the Child and Youth Advocate's mandate. It is expected that by December 2016, the investigation processes for the remainder of these reports will be completed.

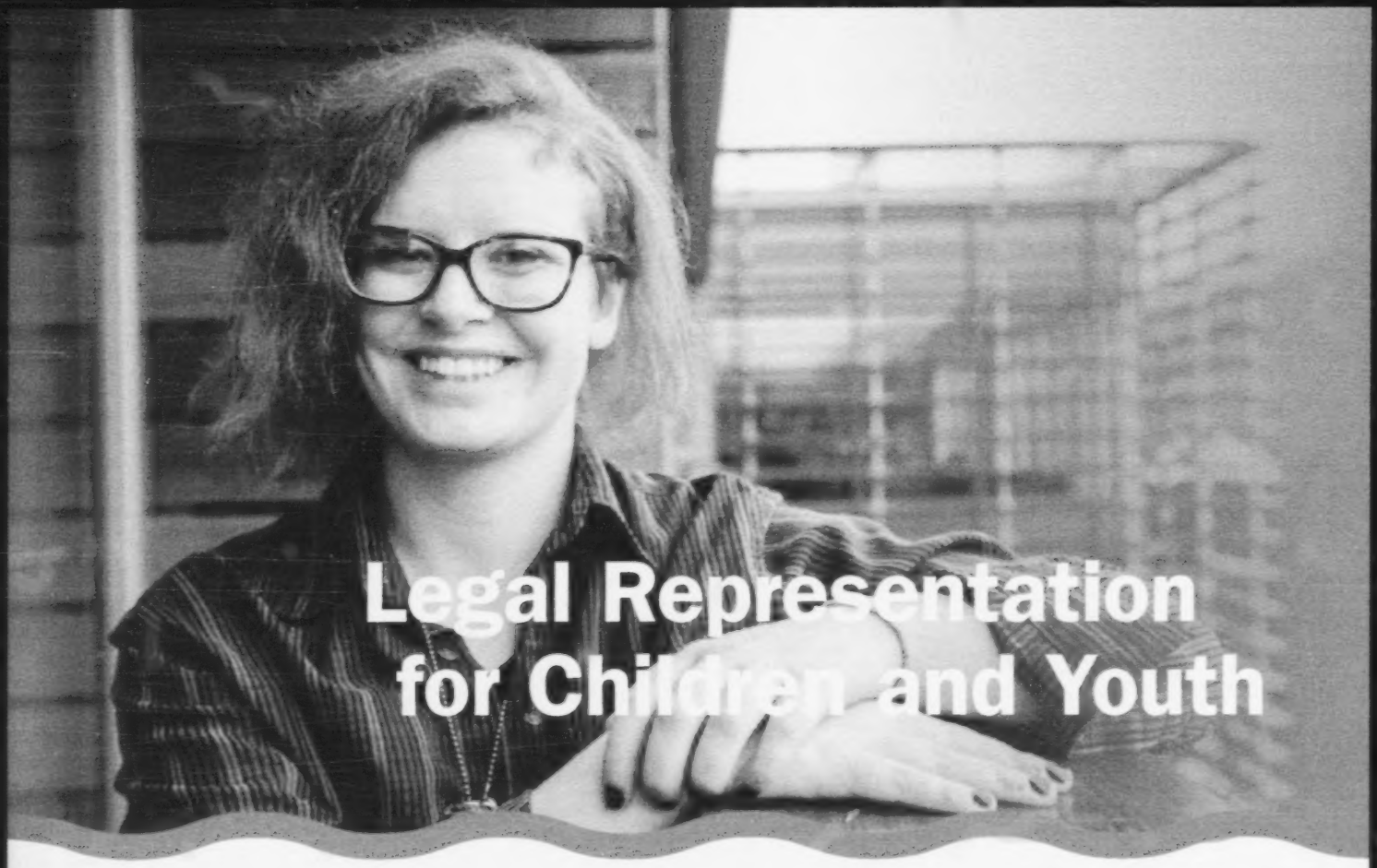
In the coming year, the OCYA expects to complete 12 Investigative Reviews. During the four years that the OCYA has been undertaking Investigative Reviews, the number of public reports it issued have increased. Recognizing this, the OCYA will be exploring the possibility of releasing reports a few times during the year, rather than releasing individual reports throughout the year. In addition to realizing efficiencies in time, this shift in approach might be more effective in drawing public attention to issues concerning vulnerable children and youth.

Building relationships with Alberta government ministries and key organizations will also remain a priority. Having strong connections with child-serving ministries, Child and Family Service regions, Delegated First Nation Agencies, and other stakeholders will help enhance our effectiveness in encouraging changes that can improve circumstances for Alberta's young people.

In the coming year, we will continue to share the stories of children and youth whose tragic circumstances come to our attention, with the goals of ensuring their voices are heard and similar tragedies are prevented from occurring in the future.



... **Youth In Care Canada (YICC)** by providing support and networking opportunities to youth in and from government care. Planning is currently underway to establish an Alberta youth in care network. All of the members of YICC are in or from care and are now doing great work in their communities. This year is also the 20th anniversary that YICC has administered the Ken Dryden Scholarship, in partnership with Ken Dryden himself. Each year these scholarships are awarded to eight young people in or from care. Each scholarship covers up to $3,000 or 80% of the cost of tuition and fees, and is renewed annually toward the completion of a first undergraduate degree, diploma, or certificate from an accredited post-secondary institution.



Legal Representation for Children and Youth

Legal Representation for Children and Youth (LRCY) provides independent legal representation for young people under the age of 18 regarding child intervention matters.

To provide legal representation, LRCY maintains a roster of private practice lawyers. As of March 31, 2016, there were 66 lawyers on the LRCY roster. LRCY roster lawyers represent the rights, interests, and viewpoints of their child and youth clients.

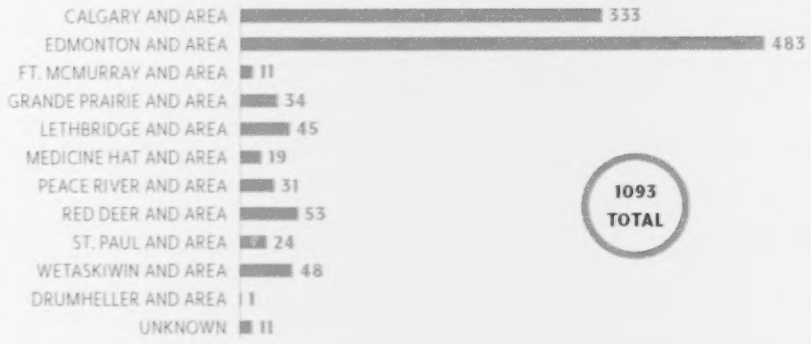
Key Activities in 2015-2016

Assisting Young People with Their Legal Needs

During the 2015-2016 reporting period, a total of 1,093 appointments involving 1,652 children were made to LRCY lawyers. These numbers were largely unchanged from the 2014-2015 reporting period.

Although the overall number of appointments remained consistent, the geographic distribution of appointments changed in 2015-2016. Appointments notably increased in Lethbridge and Area (36 per cent), and Grande Prairie and Area (21 per cent). There were significant decreases in appointments in St. Paul and Area (41 per cent), and Wetaskiwin and Area (19 per cent). Appointments in the two largest metro areas changed less drastically; Edmonton and Area rose by 10 per cent, while those in Calgary and Area decreased by six per cent.

LRCY COURT LOCATION REGION: 2015-2016


CALGARY AND AREA 333
EDMONTON AND AREA 483
FT. MCMURRAY AND AREA 11
GRANDE PRAIRIE AND AREA 34
LETHBRIDGE AND AREA 45
MEDICINE HAT AND AREA 19
PEACE RIVER AND AREA 31
RED DEER AND AREA 53
ST. PAUL AND AREA 24
WETASKIWIN AND AREA 48
DRUMHELLER AND AREA 1
UNKNOWN 11
1093 TOTAL

APPOINTMENTS BY COURT MATTER: 2015-2016

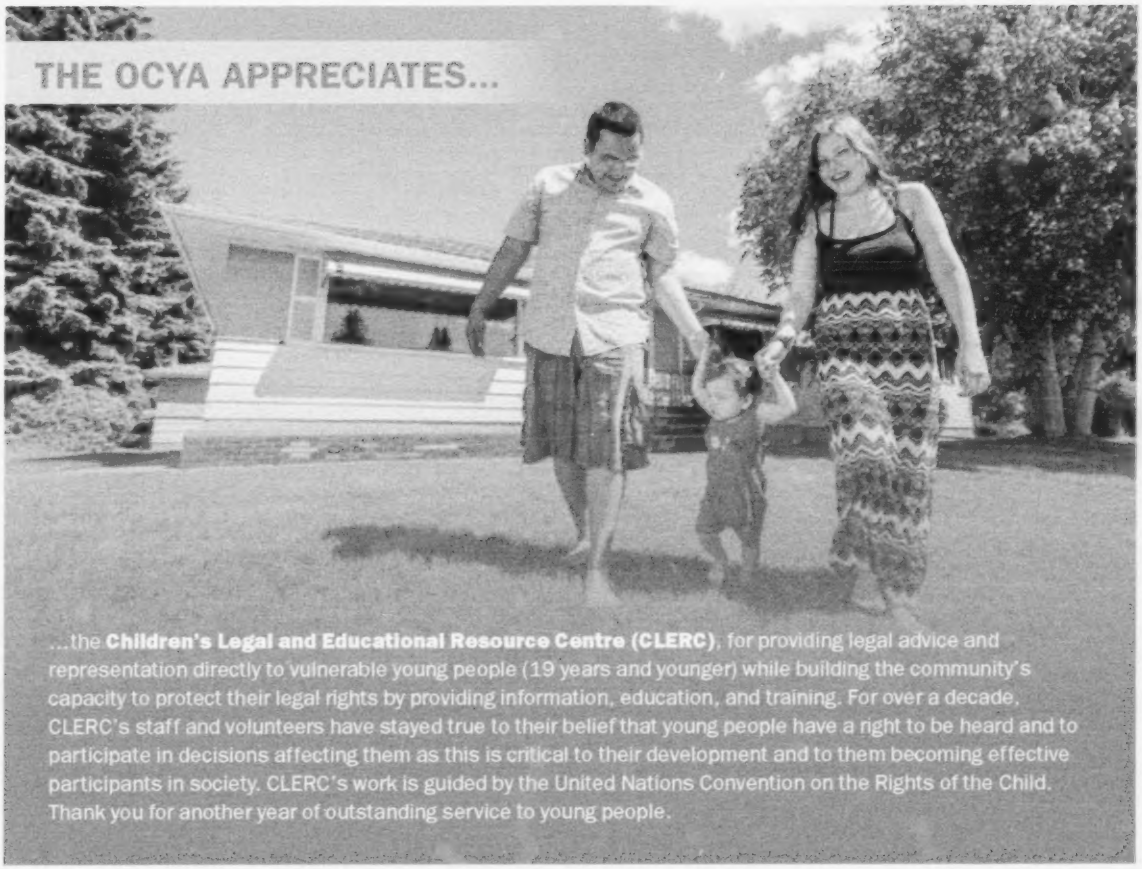
*TGO refers to Temporary Guardianship Order

**PGO refers to Permanent Guardianship Order

****PSECA* refers to Confinement Orders under the *Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act*

*****Other includes: 1) guardianship applications under the *Family Law Act* for children with permanent guardianship status; 2) applications regarding a youth's child (when the youth has *Enhancement Act* status); 3) applications under Section 35.1 of the *Enhancement Act*; and 4) consultations regarding immigration or adoption matters.

"Since its inception, LRCY has been exceptional. From its consultative process, to the integration of practical measures for ensuring that the best interests of children and youth are being served, LRCY has proven to be necessary, purposeful, adaptable and effective. Having acted as counsel for the Director, for parents and for children, I am grateful for the existence of LRCY and can speak specifically to the very positive difference that LRCY makes for the children and youth that I represent." - Ryan Callioux, LRCY Roster Lawyer


THE OCYA APPRECIATES...
...the **Children's Legal and Educational Resource Centre (CLERC)**, for providing legal advice and representation directly to vulnerable young people (19 years and younger) while building the community's capacity to protect their legal rights by providing information, education, and training. For over a decade, CLERC's staff and volunteers have stayed true to their belief that young people have a right to be heard and to participate in decisions affecting them as this is critical to their development and to them becoming effective participants in society. CLERC's work is guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Thank you for another year of outstanding service to young people.

Supporting Quality Through Professional Development

Young people represented by LRCY lawyers benefit from high quality legal services. To help support a high level of quality, LRCY has professional development expectations for roster lawyers.

For lawyers to maintain their membership on the roster, they must complete at least six hours of related, approved training each calendar year. LRCY offers professional development and training for lawyers throughout the year. During 2015-2016, the following professional development and training opportunities were offered:

- SafeTalk – Centre for Suicide Prevention Training
- OCYA's Legal Appointment and Payment System
- Building Relationships and Communicating with Children

Lunch-and-learn sessions were offered by LRCY lawyers Cheryl Arcand-Kootenay in Edmonton, and Terri Mair and Jim Robertson in Calgary. These sessions provided opportunities for lawyers to discuss current case law and exchange ideas, information, and perspectives through networking.

Exploring Best Practices in Child Legal Representation

The OCYA hosted its third biennial "Best Practices in Child Legal Representation" conference in Calgary from May 6-8, 2015. The conference offered thought-provoking sessions on child legal representation and how to represent this vulnerable population in the best possible way by:

- providing a forum to learn about new areas of practice and to share practice experiences;
- showcasing best practice in child legal representation;
- examining child intervention practices and child development; and
- heightening awareness of the importance of connections for children and youth.

The conference offered a broad range of sessions addressing such issues as child intervention, victims' services supports, and ways to strengthen Indigenous families.

Celebrating 10 Years of LRCY

In 2016, the OCYA celebrated 10 years of representing children and youth in Alberta. Two celebratory events were held: one in Edmonton and one in Calgary. Over 100 people attended, including current and former LRCY roster lawyers and OCYA staff. Thirty-five lawyers received awards for 10 years of service to the LRCY program.

Completing the LRCY Roster Review

In 2013, the OCYA reviewed roster lawyer eligibility. This resulted in a number of changes to LRCY policies, including a requirement that lawyers who wanted to remain on the roster complete a panel interview. The purpose of the panel interviews was to confirm that the roster lawyer practice aligned with the OCYA vision and mandate. Youth involvement was paramount to this process and they participated in all panel interviews. All panel interviews were completed by December 2015 and the lawyers remaining on the roster have signed new roster agreements.

Looking Ahead

Over the upcoming year, LRCY will be undertaking several activities in our ongoing effort to enhance the quality of legal representation for young people. Training for lawyers will focus on child development, interviewing young children, and emphasizing the importance of building connections and maintaining relationships with the young people they represent.

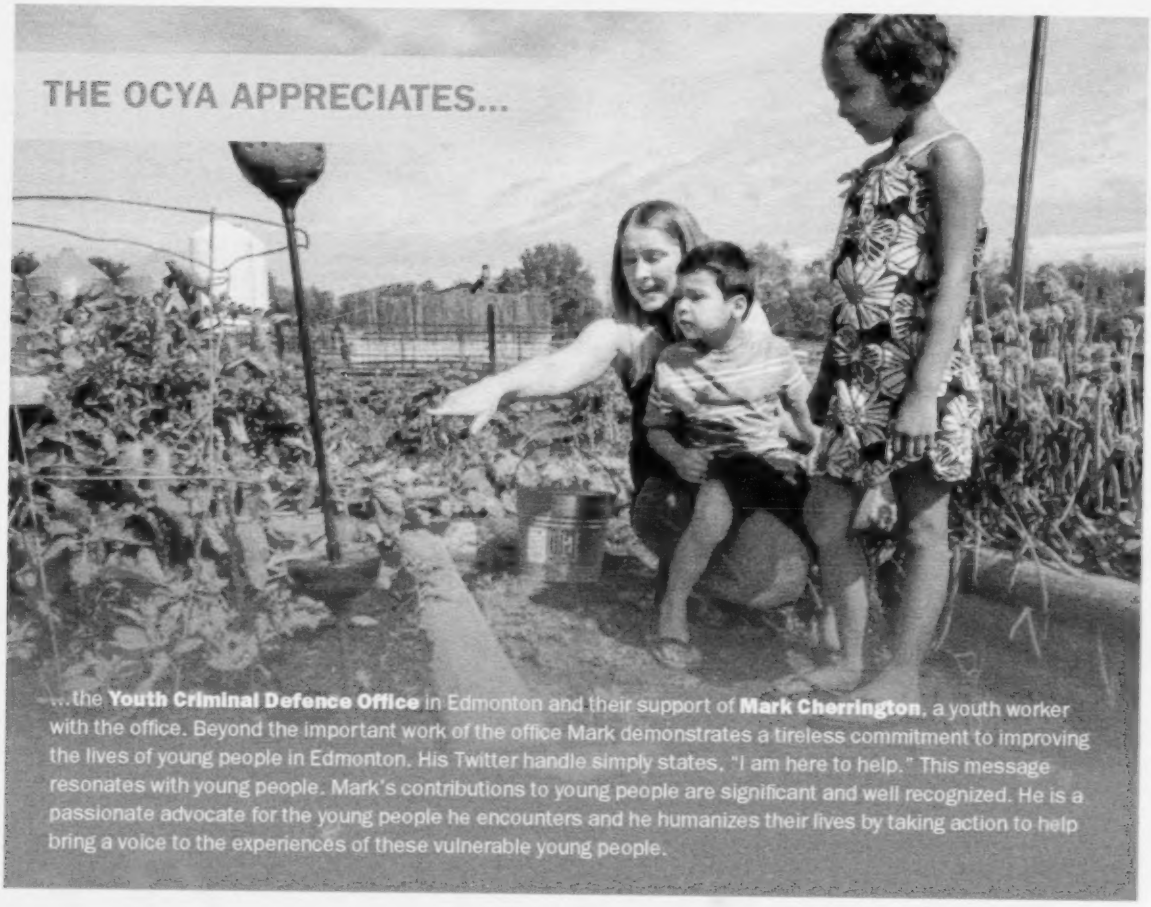
New lawyers have not been admitted to the roster in two years. A review of the roster has identified that additional, experienced child and youth lawyers are needed who:

- practice in remote communities;
- have a specialization in immigration law;
- have a specialization in Aboriginal law;
- speak more than one language, specifically Cree and American Sign Language; and/or
- have a significant understanding of Aboriginal people.

We will be working towards addressing these requirements.

Legal representation for young people in child intervention matters is needed to ensure that a young person's voice is heard and interests considered in legal matters that concern them. The OCYA will seek opportunities to inform caregivers, caseworkers, lawyers, and judges about the importance of legal representation for children and youth.

The OCYA will also increase its efforts to contact youth clients to seek their feedback about the legal services they have received from their LRCY lawyers. Feedback gathered through these efforts will help LRCY ensure that legal services remain relevant and effective, and are satisfactory to youth clients.



...the **Youth Criminal Defence Office** in Edmonton and their support of **Mark Cherrington**, a youth worker with the office. Beyond the important work of the office Mark demonstrates a tireless commitment to improving the lives of young people in Edmonton. His Twitter handle simply states, "I am here to help." This message resonates with young people. Mark's contributions to young people are significant and well recognized. He is a passionate advocate for the young people he encounters and he humanizes their lives by taking action to help bring a voice to the experiences of these vulnerable young people.

Did you know...

...we use special surveys with lots of pictures when we survey young people who may not be able to read, so that their feedback can inform the way we work.

...advocates frequently attend cultural camps and ceremonies to learn and strengthen their relationships with Aboriginal young people and their communities.

662

...during 2015-2016, the OCYA presented to 662 grade 6 students from classrooms around Alberta at the School at the Legislature, informing them about their rights.

3,000

...the OCYA received approximately 3,000 requests for advocacy-based supports or services in 2015-2016. This included general inquiries, LRCY requests, and individual advocacy.

12,000

...the OCYA was involved in 242 engagement and education activities in 2015-2016, with a total attendance of 12,000 participants.

23,000

...almost 23,000 users checked out OCYA's website in 2015-2016.

50%

...of the OCYA's engagement and education activities were for youth audiences.

Engagement and Education

Engagement and Education focuses on promoting the rights, interests, and well-being of children through strategic relationships and public education.

The Engagement and Education division is responsible for:

- public education;
- Aboriginal engagement;
- community and youth engagement; and
- communications.

An important focus of our work is engaging young people about their rights, the importance of those rights, how to exercise those rights, and how the OCYA can assist them if needed.

Stakeholder engagement is another important part of our work. These engagement activities are focused on raising awareness among adults who work with young people about the rights of children and youth and about advocacy. In addition to helping broaden understanding, these efforts strengthen the OCYA's connections in the community and support the development of strong partnerships and alliances.

Through presentations, workshops, and hosting information booths, our engagement activities also build awareness about the OCYA, its mandate, and its work.

Key Activities in 2015-2016

The division's community engagement and public education activities during 2015-2016 included presenting to, providing training to, or hosting information booths at many events and organizations. These included:

INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE CONFERENCE
ALBERTA FOSTER PARENT CONFERENCE
EDUCATION ASSISTANT CONFERENCE
ALIGN ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT SERVICES CONFERENCE
INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY IN EDMONTON
ADVOCACY 101 TRAINING TO AGENCY STAFF IN FORT MCMURRAY
DELEGATED FIRST NATION AGENCY STAFF AND CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES STAFF IN DELEGATION TRAINING SESSIONS ACROSS THE PROVINCE
NORTH CENTRAL TEACHERS CONFERENCE
GREATER EDMONTON TEACHERS CONFERENCE
TREATY 6 EDUCATORS CONFERENCE
DREAMCATCHERS YOUTH CONFERENCE
CALGARY TEACHERS CONFERENCE
GEAR UP EVENT FOR YOUTH IN CALGARY
GRADE 6 STUDENTS ATTENDING SCHOOL AT THE LEGISLATURE
MIGHTY PEACE TEACHERS CONFERENCE
NEW YOUTH JUSTICE STAFF TRAINING
QUEER PROM IN EDMONTON
MACEWAN UNIVERSITY PR FUNDAMENTAL COURSE
YOUTH AT THE EDMONTON AND CALGARY YOUNG OFFENDERS CENTRES
ALBERTA COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORKERS ANNUAL CONFERENCE
CENTRAL EAST TEACHERS CONFERENCE

Celebrating National Child Day

National Child Day is celebrated to mark two historic events: the 1959 signing of the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child; and the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989.

Each year, countries around the world recognize National Child Day as a reminder of their shared commitment to the CRC, which has been signed and ratified by more nations than any other human rights treaty in history.

The OCYA supported and championed National Child Day in Alberta by participating in provincial and local committees, activities, and events. As part of National Child Day celebrations, the OCYA launched a video contest that helped children and youth

Article 42 of the CRC is the right to know about your rights and for adults to help you learn them.

in Alberta to learn about their rights. Young people from across Alberta were challenged to produce a one-minute video that put one of the 54 articles of the CRC into their own words. They were encouraged to creatively use song, poetry, art, script or other approaches in producing their videos.

Many young people took part in this contest, and the OCYA received many imaginative entries. Congratulations to our video contest winners! Winning video submissions can be viewed on the OCYA's website, at: http://www.ocya.alberta.ca/child/videos/.

"When I was put into child welfare I wasn't told my rights. I have the right to know my rights."

[Youth Advisory Panel]

"I got bullied for being a Muslim. I have the right to speak my own language."

Engaging the Advice of Youth

The OCYA has established a Youth Advisory Panel made up of nine young people from across Alberta. These young people meet quarterly to provide input, advice, and feedback to the OCYA.

Among its activities during 2015-2016, the Youth Advisory Panel:

- Provided their thoughts on the OCYA's Special Report on Aboriginal young people in government care, and on the OCYA's Investigative Review, *Toward a Better Tomorrow: Addressing the Challenge of Aboriginal Youth Suicide*.
- Explored National Child Day themes, including the "right to learn" (2015), and consulted around the "right to belong" (2016). As part of planning and engagement activities for National Child Day, a member of the Panel presented on the "right to belong"' at a regional stakeholder event.
- Participated in producing a video to announce and promote the OCYA's National Child Day Video Contest.
- Contributed to the development and design of OCYA newsletters and resources, including a video on procedural rights.
- Consulted with the OCYA's Health and Wellness Committee.
- Assisted in the design and planning for the development of a Self-Advocacy Toolkit.
- Explored the concept of advocacy through expressive art, and facilitated art-based focus groups on "How to be an Advocate" for the LRCY Conference.
- Met with Marlie McGonigle and her service dog, Wren, from the Zebra Child Protection Centre's Very Important Paws program.
- Advised the OCYA on its use of social media in connecting and engaging with young people.
- Learned about the Youth in Care Network and the International Congress on Child Abuse and Neglect.
- Provided commentary on the design of the 2014-2015 OCYA Annual Report.

The views and perspectives gathered from members of the Youth Advisory Panel have been insightful and informative in helping the OCYA continuously improve the quality and effectiveness of its work.

In 2016, a number of members completed their terms of service with the Youth Advisory Panel and received certificates recognizing their leadership and service. Members completing their terms say they appreciated the opportunity to advocate for young people's rights as part of the OCYA, and the personal growth opportunities that they were afforded through the involvement with the Panel.

"The Youth Advisory Panel has provided a foundation to build on my advocacy skills."

"It is exciting to be asked our opinions and to feel important."

"The panel has helped me have a clear voice and more confidence."

[Youth Advisory Panel]

"The Youth Panel has put a name (advocacy) on what I was already doing and gave me more purpose to do the work better."

Communicating with Young People and Friends of the Advocate

The OCYA's Friends of the Advocate ("Friends") is an opportunity for young people in Alberta to stay connected with our office in a meaningful way and be involved in the activities of advocacy and children's rights. We connect regularly with Friends and send them monthly updates on how they can become involved with the activities of our office, including presentations, feedback on activities, and inclusion in our publications.

This year our Friends received monthly updates that promoted opportunities to join the work of our office, offer feedback on our work, and inspire them to work from a rights-based perspective. Friends joined us for photo shoots, were participants in focus groups for our Special Report, and aided us in making presentations to professionals who work with youth in care. Going forward, our goal is to continue engaging Friends of the Advocate and offering them ways to meaningfully contribute to the work of our office.

Youth Advisory Panel's Recipe for Goodness (May 2015):

What good can we create that has never been made before?

Gather the following ingredients: nurture unity solidarity equality love diversity hope compassion empowerment beauty safety understanding growth impact

Mix well, simmer, and see what comes together.

Anticipate and believe in good results.

Serve generously for the benefit of all people.

During the past year we published two issues of our newsletter for young people receiving designated services – *OCYA News*. Our spring/summer issue focused on Article 30 of the CRC, "the right for young people to practice their culture, language, and tradition." The fall/winter issue focused on young people's "right to learn" (Article 28 of the CRC) and in addition, promoted the OCYA's National Child Day Video Contest.

Our newsletters continue to focus on educating young people about their rights and including them in opportunities to engage in the activities of the OCYA.

Supporting the Advocate's Special Report

The Engagement and Education division led the development of the OCYA's Special Report on the over-representation of Aboriginal young people in Alberta's child welfare system.

After having an initial meeting with Elders in January 2015, the OCYA undertook a series of focus groups from April 2015 to January 2016. These focus groups provided input and perspectives from organizations and individuals – including young people – about Aboriginal representation in the child welfare system.

In total, the OCYA heard from 746 people across Alberta. While most of these individuals were engaged through in-person focus groups, some were engaged through online surveys, phone interviews, and hard copy surveys.

Our staff travelled throughout the province to hear from Aboriginal young people, Elders, family members, caregivers, and other stakeholders. The OCYA expects to release the Special Report during the 2016-2017 reporting period. Look for our Special Report *Voices for Change: Aboriginal Child Welfare in Alberta* here: http://www.ocya.alberta.ca/adult/publications/ocya-reports/.

Looking Ahead

In the coming year, the Engagement and Education Division has a number of goals to improve the quality of their work such as:

- researching an interactive smartphone app that enables young people to learn about their rights and what to expect from government systems that serve them;
- reaching out to rural and isolated communities to deliver training related to child advocacy;
- developing online learning modules and videos for service providers, including caregivers, to help them understand their responsibility to advocate for young people;
- expanding rights education into targeted schools and shelters to help create a more supportive environment for vulnerable young people;
- exploring ways to grow our Friends of the Advocate program and create further volunteer opportunities;
- implementing more youth-friendly evaluation tools for informal presentations;
- exploring the possibility of hosting a Youth Forum to provide an inclusive opportunity for youth across Alberta to share their voices on important issues and learn about the OCYA and its advocacy; and
- focusing on areas where we have presented or hosted focus groups and forums with First Nations and Métis peoples, to maintain and strengthen our connections with these communities.

Strategic Support

Strategic Support provides advice and business services to the OCYA in the areas of finance, budget and business planning, human resources, information management and technology, accommodations, and administrative services.

In September 2015, the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approved the 2015-2016 budget for the OCYA of $13,242,000 for its operations and capital requirements.

The approved budget reflected additional funding that had been provided during the previous year through a supplementary estimate, made whole for the 2015-2016 fiscal year, less an overall 2 per cent reduction to the budget that was applied to all Legislative Offices.

During the past fiscal year, nine staff were recruited to vacant positions throughout the organization to enhance the delivery of services to and on behalf of young people. As well, a review was completed of the administrative support requirements of the office and changes were implemented to improve support for program areas.

Key Activities in 2015-2016

Addressing Human Resource Needs

In July 2015, the OCYA entered into a shared service agreement with Alberta Education to receive support for human resources. Through this collaborative arrangement we have strengthened the recruitment and classification processes, and have been able to provide enhanced support to employees and management on human resource issues. This arrangement has provided the OCYA with access to a full range of human resource services while being fiscally prudent.

During 2015-2016, we continued to focus our efforts on workplace safety. All members of the Occupational Health and Safety Committee completed their certification training. The Committee focused on developing employee hazard assessments for all positions within the OCYA. In addition, incident management training was provided to all managers and supervisors.

We continued to support the implementation of the OCYA's health and wellness initiatives, with a focus on OCYA workplace culture.

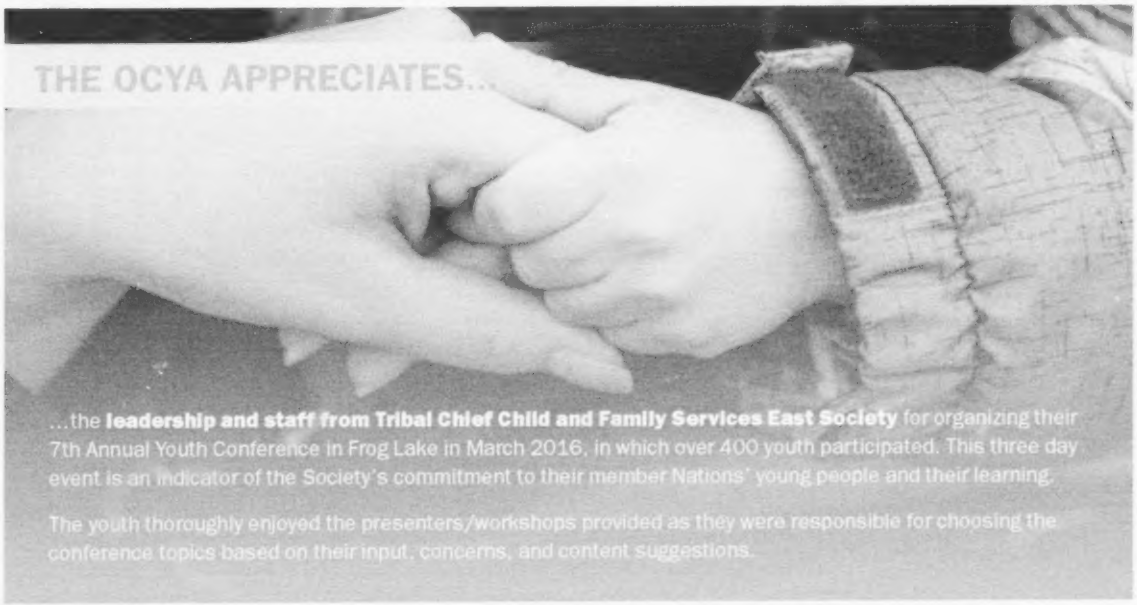
Planning a Move

During 2015-2016, our office began working with Alberta Infrastructure on the relocation of the OCYA's south office to a new location in downtown Calgary. The move is planned for the summer of 2016.

Enhancing Information Technology in the OCYA

This past year a number of initiatives were undertaken to enhance the information technology systems of the OCYA.

- A new investigations system was implemented, which now provides investigators with better access to information on reports of serious injuries and deaths, and facilitates more efficient management of files through the investigations process.
- An internal SharePoint site was launched, to support internal communications and access to internal information.
- From July 2015 through March 2016, work was pursued with the Ministry of Human Services and information technology (IT) service providers, to develop an IT environment within the OCYA to support the organization's program applications. The program applications previously resided within the Ministry of Human Services' IT environment. The first phase of this initiative focused on reviewing the current state of applications and identifying hardware, software, licensing, and network requirements. The second phase focused on building the infrastructure, and the migration of applications and related data to the OCYA's new IT environment. With this migration project complete, the OCYA has now become fully independent from the Ministry of Human Services.
- **The OCYA continued to collaborate with its partnering Legislative Offices (the Ombudsman, Public Interest Commissioner, and Ethics Commissioner) to improve the shared IT environment and to address system resumption and disaster recovery requirements.**



THE OCYA APPRECIATES...

...the **leadership and staff from Tribal Chief Child and Family Services East Society** for organizing their 7th Annual Youth Conference in Frog Lake in March 2016, in which over 400 youth participated. This three day event is an indicator of the Society's commitment to their member Nations' young people and their learning.

The youth thoroughly enjoyed the presenters/workshops provided as they were responsible for choosing the conference topics based on their input, concerns, and content suggestions.

Looking Ahead

In the year ahead, Strategic Support will continue to ensure that appropriate resources and systems are available to support the operations of the OCYA. Strategic Support expects to focus on the following initiatives in the coming year by:

- relocating the OCYA south office to the AMEC Building in downtown Calgary;
- implementing the Human Resources Strategic Plan, which focuses on achieving high performance through employee engagement, strengthening OCYA's succession and leadership capacity, promoting OCYA through increased awareness, implementing the Public Service Competency Model, and enhancing human resource supports and policies;
- guiding the continued implementation of health and wellness initiatives to support the culture of the OCYA;
- continuing to develop and implement controls and training requirements that support the occupational health and safety needs of the office;
- refining the OCYA's business plan to better reflect goals and priorities, along with reviewing and assessing existing performance measures and targets;
- implementing enhancements to the Legal Appointments and Payments System to reduce manual workflows and improve communications and timeliness of approvals for LRCY roster lawyers;
- implementing the OCYA's IT disaster recovery plan and business continuity plan;
- enhancing program applications to support quality assurance reviews; and
- continuing to identify and pursue opportunities to enhance operational efficiencies throughout the OCYA.

"At Long View, we love what we do. We help our customers succeed through the use of technology. It's a very fulfilling mandate. But even more so when you have a customer like OCYA. We are deeply honoured they have given us the opportunity to support the vital work they do."
- Don Bialik, CEO

Quality Assurance

The OCYA strives to provide the best possible services. We deliver services that are consistently being improved. We are accountable to our key stakeholders. With a focus on quality assurance, we are better able to review and improve our services.

As noted in last year's Annual Report, a decision was made to consolidate quality assurance into a distinct operational area under the Executive Director, Child and Youth Advocacy. Making this organizational change has enabled the OCYA to bring focus to quality assurance activities, through dedicated people and resources.

The Quality Assurance unit undertakes data analysis, program evaluation, and performance management to continuously improve the quality of services provided by the OCYA.

Key Activities in 2015-2016

Bringing Focus to Quality Assurance

During the past year, the Systemic Advocacy, Evaluation and Research unit was established and became operational. Substantial planning was undertaken to consolidate quality assurance work from other areas of the OCYA, determine the gaps and the responsibilities of the unit, and identify the unit's staffing needs. The unit includes five full-time positions.

Encouraging Quality Through Better Service Standards

A review of the OCYA's service standards and performance measures began this past year, along with efforts to develop additional standards for certain areas of the OCYA's work (such as investigations).

Through its participation in the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates (CCCYA), the OCYA ratified new national standards in September 2015. The CCCYA *National Advocacy Standards* describe the minimum expected level of service provided by CCCYA member organizations. The standards set out implementable and measurable service targets. To ensure a consistent quality of work, the standards also provide a guiding framework for operations, a direction for staff training, and a means to evaluate service.

Recognizing that each CCCYA member has a distinct mandate from their province or territory, the means by which the *National Advocacy Standards* are met and the criteria used to determine compliance with the standards will be established by each member in accordance with their mandate. More information about the CCCYA *National Advocacy Standards* can be found on the OCYA website.[15]

Assessing our Performance

As part of its commitment to provide high-quality services for children and youth, and to continuously improve those services, the OCYA regularly measures its performance.

During the past year, the OCYA's work was guided by its Business Plan 2015–2018, which identified strategic priorities, established organizational goals, and set out performance measures and targets for those goals.

Advocacy Services

The OCYA reaches out to young people to gather feedback about the services they have received. Once an advocate has completed their services for a young person, an independent contractor conducts a telephone survey with that young person to hear about their experiences. Comments provided by young people are shared with their advocate in a non-identifying manner.

Up until this year, surveys of young people have typically been limited to those aged 12 years and older. During the past year, the OCYA began contacting younger children about the services they received. These efforts will continue next year.

	Last Actual 2014-2015	**Target** 2015-2016	**Actual** 2015-2016
Percentage of youth who indicate their advocate listened to them and represented their viewpoints.	97%	85%	96%
Percentage of youth who were satisfied that their advocate made a positive difference for them.	98%	85%	92%

In 2015-2016, 108 young people aged 10 years and older provided feedback about their experiences working with an advocate. The overwhelming majority of young people agreed that their advocate listened to them and communicated what was important to them (96 per cent) and that they believed their advocate made a positive difference for them (92 per cent). While both of these results are lower than the previous year, both exceeded the 2015-2016 targets.

15 http://www.ocya.alberta.ca/adult/publications/external-reports/

"He was the only person who listened to me my whole stay there (in lock-up)."

"She could have pushed a little harder."

What young people have to say about their advocate...

"Out of all my workers, I know she was the one to always hear me and make sure my point of view was heard."

"He helped me find my words."

"He was really great all around – friendly, personable, easy to talk to .. but also very professional. He didn't just advocate for me, he helped me advocate for myself."

Given that advocacy for children and youth is central to its mandate, the OCYA helps assure quality through the use of Advocacy Service Standards. The standards represent what is minimally expected of an advocate in providing services to a young person. The Advocacy Service Standards are an internal measure to assess our own performance in the provision of advocacy services.

Compliance to these standards is measured to help identify opportunities to strengthen the OCYA's advocacy efforts. On an annual basis, independent contractors review all closed files in the previous year to assess compliance with the standards. Results of these reviews are posted on the OCYA's website.

Advocacy Service Standards	Compliance Rate 2014-2015	Target
Standard 1 Responding to referrals in 2 days	95%	80%
Standard 3[16] Face-to-face contact with young people	93%	80%
Standard 4 Information gathering initiated in 7 days	95%	85%
Standard 5 Information gathering completed in 30 days	78%	85%
Standard 6 Documentation of rationale for whether or not advocacy services are provided	99.5%	100%
Standard 7 Documentation of whether advocacy will be directed by the young person and rationale	98%	100%
Standard 8 Decision on whether the young person will direct advocacy is consistent with policy	96%	80%
Standard 9A Advocacy plan developed within 15 days when advocacy is directed by a young person	96%	80%
Standard 9B Advocacy plan developed within 30 days when young person is not able to direct advocacy	90%	80%
Standard 10 Youth involved in advocacy plan	99%	90%
Standard 11 Activity recorded every 60 days at minimum	89%	80%

16 Standard 2 was discontinued shortly after the standards were implemented.

During the review period, the OCYA exceeded its performance targets on the majority of the Advocacy Service Standards. Performance was particularly strong when it came to involving young people in developing advocacy plans for their issues, and having them direct the implementation of those plans. The OCYA firmly believes that children and youth should play these roles in planning and directing their advocacy, and it is encouraging to see that our advocacy work reflects these fundamental beliefs.

One area for improvement in the OCYA's advocacy work is the length of time taken to complete information gathering. The OCYA will be exploring ways to enhance efficiencies in this area.

Engagement and Education

The OCYA engages youth who are involved with Alberta's youth justice system. This includes outreach sessions and presentations. Youth who attend these activities are surveyed to help gauge the effectiveness of our engagement in enhancing their understanding of their rights and how OCYA advocates can help.

	Last Actual 2014-2015	**Target** 2015-2016	**Actual** 2015-2016
Percentage of youth involved in the youth justice system that attend OCYA awareness and outreach sessions say they better understand how an advocate can assist them in having their rights, interests and viewpoints heard by decision makers.	100%	85%	92%

Again this year, the OCYA exceeded its target for enhancing awareness among young people who attended an OCYA presentation at a youth justice centre. In 2015-2016, 182 young people provided feedback after attending an OCYA presentation at a youth justice facility. Of these, 92 per cent of respondents understood more about how an advocate can help them have their rights, interests, and viewpoints heard.

The OCYA routinely engages with stakeholder organizations, including adults who regularly work with vulnerable children and youth, to raise awareness about young people's rights and about the OCYA. As a way of assessing the effectiveness of our engagement in raising awareness, participants are periodically asked to provide feedback following an engagement session.

	Last Actual 2014-2015	**Target** 2015-2016	**Actual** 2015-2016
Percentage of stakeholders, including young people, that indicate they were more informed of the role of the OCYA and the rights of young people, after attending a public education session.	97%	85%	96%

During 2015-2016, the OCYA formally gathered feedback from 582 individuals at 40 public education presentations and workshops.

Among responding participants, 96 per cent agreed that they were more informed of the role of the OCYA and the rights of young people after attending the session. The vast majority of participants who were surveyed also felt that the presentation was informative and useful (97 per cent), and that they would know what to do if they or someone they knew could benefit from the OCYA's services (95 per cent).

"Spent much of the presentation thinking of youth on my caseload and will remember to include them in conversations about them."

"I would welcome a return visit to further explore how our programs might be able to work together."

What participants have to say about their OCYA public education session...

"I like how [the presenter] was very detailed and specific in youths' rights. Maybe do a youth's city conference so all young teens can go – not every child has access to phone, internet.."

"I will be able to put youth in contact with the Advocate's office without the fear of reprisal."

"Make more presentations in First Nation communities."

Systemic Advocacy

After recommendations are made by the Child and Youth Advocate in an Investigative Review or Special Report, the OCYA follows up and notes the progress achieved on those recommendations. During 2015-2016, the Child and Youth Advocate made recommendations to the Ministry of Human Services and to Alberta Health Services.

	Last Actual 2014-2015	Target 2015-2016	Actual 2015-2016
All recommendations are followed up on with the respective systems within six months and are reported on by the Child and Youth Advocate.	100%	95%	100%

The Ministry of Human Services initially provided responses on ten Investigative Review reports, followed by additional updates and actions on eight of them. Three Investigative Review reports contained recommendations directed to other public bodies (Ministry of Health, Alberta Health Services, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta, and the Alberta College of Pharmacists).

Investigations

The OCYA measures indicators regarding the performance of the investigations process. The current performance measures pre-date legislative amendments that markedly expanded the investigative mandate of the Child and Youth Advocate.

Over the past two reporting periods, the OCYA has been working to keep pace with a much larger volume of investigations than was anticipated when the measures were originally established.

In 2015-2016, eight Investigative Review reports (which reviewed the deaths or serious injuries of 14 young people) were completed. In addition, 22 Assessments and 39 Examinations were completed during this reporting period. In total, the circumstances of 75 young people were reviewed as part of the OCYA's investigations process over the past year. By comparison, the circumstances of 46 young people were reviewed in 2014-2015, including five Investigative Reviews, 30 Examinations, and 11 Assessments.

It takes teamwork to complete an Investigative Review. Apart from the work done by our Investigations division, we count on the assistance of other organizations such as Alberta Human Services, Alberta Justice and Solicitor General, police departments, and educational institutions to provide us with the records we require. We also rely on family members, alternate care providers, and other key stakeholders to assist us in telling the young person's story and identifying systemic issues. In situations where the young person is Aboriginal, we take additional time to be inclusionary of their community. Finally, it would not be possible to undertake Investigative Reviews without the invaluable insight we gain from the involvement of our expert review committees.

The OCYA strives to meet the target of completing 85 per cent of Investigative Reviews within one year of determining that an Investigation is required. However, the goal of meeting the target cannot take precedence over the quality of the investigating, reporting, and telling of the young person's story. Conducting a thorough investigation, writing a report, and developing valuable recommendations while being respectful of the time and needs of family members, stakeholders, and the young person (if our review is in relation to a serious injury) continues to be the philosophy of the OCYA.

In 2015-2016, the Advocate completed a report involving seven Investigative Reviews, *Toward a Better Tomorrow: Addressing the Challenge of Aboriginal Youth Suicide*. Undertaking such a report was complex and took longer than anticipated. It was important to be sensitive to significant dates such as birthdays and to ensure proper protocols were followed. Suicide is the leading cause of death among the Aboriginal youth population. Over the past three years, 43.5 per cent of all Aboriginal youth (12 years and older) reported to the OCYA were related to suicide or attempted suicide. The Advocate chose to share the stories of seven of these young people together to highlight this tragic situation, to raise awareness about, and to hopefully prevent incidents of Aboriginal youth suicide into the future.

In May 2014, the Advocate's mandate was expanded to include a review of the circumstances of young people who had received Child Intervention Services within two years of their death (with the exception of adoptions). This expanded mandate resulted in a 102 per cent increase in notifications to the OCYA, compared to the previous year. The Investigations division was not at an adequate staffing level to manage the increase, and a backlog thus began to form.

In 2015-2016, with a full staffing complement, Investigations closed 14 Investigative Reviews and 61 additional cases (22 Assessments and 39 Examinations), and continued to work on 16 Investigative Reviews that were reported in both 2014-2015 and 2015-2016.

Legal Representation for Children and Youth

With the aim of continuously improving, the OCYA reaches out to young people to hear about the legal services they have received.

Once an LRCY lawyer has completed their services to a young person, an independent contractor conducts a telephone survey with that young person to hear about their experiences. Comments provided by young people are shared with their lawyer in a non-identifying manner. The lawyers working with the OCYA have said they appreciate and place a high level of importance on this feedback.

	Last Actual 2014-2015	Target 2015-2016	Actual 2015-2016
Percentage of youth, 12 years of age and over, that indicate they are satisfied with their legal representation.	82%	90%	87%

After working with an LRCY roster lawyer in 2015-2016, 165 youth were asked about their experiences with their lawyer. Youth were asked "Were you happy with the legal services you received from your lawyer?" Eighty-seven per cent of young people responded positively. This was an increase from 2014-2015, but is somewhat lower than the target for 2015-2016, which was 90 per cent.

"My lawyer was excellent. She was friendly, kind and caring."

"I really loved her go to attitude. I was comfortable around her."

What young people have to say about their lawyer...

"He gave it his all."

"Follow up with kids after court, so we know how it went."

"He was really good, he was thorough and he really took the time to answer my questions."

During 2015-2016, LRCY lawyer files are reviewed for compliance to the LRCY Service Standards. The LRCY Service Standards serve a purpose similar to the Advocacy Service Standards, in that they represent what is minimally expected of an LRCY lawyer in providing services to a young person.

	Last Actual 2014-2015	Target 2015-2016	Actual 2015-2016
Percentage of lawyers on the LRCY Roster that achieve an overall rating of 90% in meeting the LRCY Service Standards.	Under development*	85%	44%

*this performance measure was new to the 2015-2018 Business Plan.

During this reporting period, the performance of 36 lawyers was reviewed for compliance to the LRCY Service Standards. Reviews are completed after a lawyer has been on the roster for over one year, and every two years thereafter. Reviews that are being reported on in 2015-2016 are for lawyers who were reviewed as part of the 2014-2015 Service Standards Monitoring process. Of the 36 lawyers who were reviewed, 16 (or 44 per cent) had an overall rating of 90 per cent for the seven standards.

LRCY Service Standards	Compliance Rate 2014-2015	Target
Standard 1A Reporting indicates face-to-face contact with each young person before making submissions to the court	92%	95%
Standard 1B Reporting indicates a contact with each young person after the final court date	81%	95%
Standard 2 Reporting indicates the lawyer gathered and examined all relevant information	98%	95%
Standard 3 Reporting indicates the young person's views and preferences were before the court	72%	75%
Standard 4 Reporting indicates the appointed lawyer personally attended all hearings of substance	98%	95%
Standard 5 Reporting indicates the lawyer advised the young person of his/her procedural rights	64%	75%
Standard 6 Invoices are received in a timely manner	81%	90%

Overall, compliance rates with the LRCY Service Standards were mixed. Targets were exceeded on Standards 2 and 4. Compliance on Standard 5 fell during the past year (compared to the previous year). Over half of the lawyers reviewed rarely reported on this Standard. Work is underway to ensure that all lawyers on the LRCY roster understand LRCY reporting requirements.

Looking Ahead

In the year ahead, the Quality Assurance division will be working collaboratively across the entire organization to review, update, and develop new standards, performance measures, and targets. These will help determine the OCYA's effectiveness and provide guidance on where opportunities exist to enhance its performance. We will also be finalizing the OCYA's new Quality Assurance Framework and developing a three-year plan to move forward with the framework.

We are undertaking a review of the goal in our Business Plan regarding Investigative Reviews and the associated performance measures to indicate the quality of this work. Currently, the performance measures relate only to timing. While timing is one consideration for the quality of Investigative Reviews, there are other measures that should be included to more comprehensively assess the quality of our performance in this area. We expect to complete the review in the coming year, along with the development of a revised Business Plan goal and revised performance measures.

We will also continue to explore how to best measure the OCYA's effectiveness in working with younger children. When young people are unable to direct advocacy or provide feedback to us through traditional means, it is important we find an alternative mechanism for them to communicate. We expect to develop more "child friendly" survey tools and other means to ask younger children about the services they received from the OCYA.

With greater research capacity, we intend to expand our knowledge on best practices and dig deeper on how to improve the circumstances for young people. There are promising practices and research happening throughout Alberta, and the OCYA will be looking for opportunities to partner with others in order to be a part of these promising and exciting efforts.

"Being challenged to always do better is a key element in quality assurance and continuous improvement. The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate works effectively to ensure the voices of the children and youth we work with are heard, and that situations where our services could have been more aligned with the needs of our clients are quickly resolved. Having a strong OCYA has improved both our practice and the outcomes for those we serve." - Russ Pickford, Regional Director, Specialized Services, Edmonton and Area, Alberta Human Services

In Closing

One of the most important ways we can assist vulnerable children and youth is to help them to have meaningful connections in their lives.

Each day at the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, we work to fashion, nurture, and enhance such connections. In doing so, we help young people learn about and exercise their rights, and we help others better understand and acknowledge the rights, interests, and viewpoints of vulnerable children and youth in Alberta.

I thank the staff of the OCYA for their tireless efforts to improve the circumstances of vulnerable young people in Alberta. Your hard work during the past year has strengthened the OCYA's connections with government ministries, with stakeholders, with the public-at-large and, most importantly, with the young people who have looked to us for assistance. I am proud of our growth as an organization and what we have accomplished together.

I also offer thanks to our stakeholders and allies. We have done our utmost over the past year to develop stronger relationships with you. The result has been a great deal of learning on our part, and the knowledge we have gained from our relationships will help strengthen our effectiveness in assisting children and youth.

Our office had the privilege of further developing our relationships with First Nations and Métis communities this year. I thank them for welcoming us into their communities and homes, and for sharing their wisdom about Aboriginal children and families. We hope to further nurture these relationships in the months and years ahead, as we know there is much more for us to learn and much more work to do to improve the circumstances of Aboriginal young people in Alberta.

To the young people whom we have had the privilege of serving and assisting this year, I also offer thanks. While each of your circumstances, stories, and lives are unique, you all share a remarkable courage in your willingness to make your voices heard and your perspectives known. You not only inspire us, but also serve as examples to other children and youth who feel unheard in matters affecting their lives.

While it was a particular focus of our efforts this past year, the goal of strengthening connections will not fade in importance. It is an ongoing quest on which we place high value and from which we know there are high dividends for vulnerable children and youth.

As we craft this Annual Report, we are looking ahead to the Legislative Assembly's review of the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*. This will offer an opportunity to strengthen connections between the public, through their participation in the review, and the OCYA, which is mandated to deliver this legislation.

The review will serve to reinforce the cornerstones of our work: recognizing that children are our province's greatest resource; ensuring the rights, interests, and viewpoints of vulnerable young people in government systems are considered in matters affecting them; and continuously advocating to improve services to vulnerable children and youth.

With this in mind, the OCYA will continue to increase the strength of its connections with vulnerable young people and with those who support them. As the strength of these relationships grow, so too will the difference we make for children and youth in Alberta.

[Original signed by Del Graff]

Del Graff
Child and Youth Advocate

Appendix A

2015-2016 Recommendations made in Investigative Review Reports

Between April 1, 2015 and March 31, 2016, the OCYA completed eight Investigative Review reports.[17] These reports are available through the OCYA's website.[18]

16-Year-Old Sam: Serious Injury[19]

Sam was found unconscious after attempting suicide in a residential facility. He sustained life threatening injuries that resulted in lasting impairments to his health. Sam cannot walk independently. He has the use of only one arm, and his speech and memory are impaired. At the time of his injury, Sam was the subject of a Permanent Guardianship Order (PGO).[20]

The Investigative Review examined three systemic issues:

- The need for early intervention;
- The importance of relationships;
- Suicide risk assessment and care.

A review of these systemic issues resulted in three recommendations:

1. The Ministry of Human Services needs greater early intentional focus on assessment and intervention that includes an equal emphasis on children, siblings and parents.
2. The Ministry of Human Services should find ways to teach children and youth about healthy connections and attachment. Steps need to be taken to assist young people to maintain healthy connections. Added supports should be provided to help young people when important relationships are disrupted by change.
3. The Ministry of Human Services should provide caregivers and caseworkers with the skills they require to engage with suicidal youth on an ongoing regular basis and encourage young people to develop, identify and practice positive coping skills.

17 One Investigative Review, 16-Year-Old Sam, was completed during the previous reporting period but not included in the 2014-2015 Annual Report. For completeness, it is included in this year's report.

18 http://www.ocya.alberta.ca/adult/publications/investigative-review/

19 Completed in March 2015 and released in May 2015.

20 The Director is the sole guardian of the child.

9-Year-Old Bonita: Serious Injury

Bonita was taken to hospital suffering from septic shock caused by severe untreated dental abscesses and malnutrition. She required surgery and was hospitalized for about two months. Her injuries were life threatening and she will require plastic surgery as she gets older. At the time of her injury, Bonita was in her parents' care and Child Intervention Services[21] was working with her family.

The Investigative Review examined two systemic issues:

- The impact of poverty and parents' ability to meet the basic needs of their children;
- Addictions, co-dependency and the impact on children.

A review of these systemic issues resulted in three recommendations:

1. The Ministry of Human Services should provide clear support for child intervention workers to intervene earlier when neglect is identified as a protection concern. Practical concrete response is required to address the factors that contribute to the neglect of children.
2. The Ministry of Human Services should engage stakeholders to identify issues and opportunities to address neglect in a manner consistent with best practice. Resources should be committed to help families living in poverty to alleviate child neglect concerns.
3. a) The Ministry of Human Services, with its service delivery partners, should develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and/or protocol to work together so addictions expertise and consultation is provided to frontline child intervention workers who are working with families where addictions concerns are present.

   b) The Ministry of Human Services should dedicate resources to increase frontline workers' knowledge of addictions and the impact parental addictions has on children.

Six-Week-Old Nicole

Baby Nicole fell asleep on her father's chest and when he woke the next morning, she was not breathing. At the time of her death, Nicole's family was receiving support from Child Intervention Services through an Enhancement Agreement. Nicole's father was a young parent who was solely responsible for his very young twins. While he had some learning and cognitive challenges, he loved his children and was trying to provide for their needs in the best ways he could.

The Investigative Review examined two systemic issues:

- Tailoring child intervention service delivery;
- Ongoing evaluation of the child intervention case plan.

A review of these systemic issues resulted in two recommendations:

1. The Ministry of Human Services should strengthen its capacity to provide relevant assessment, planning and intervention methods to effectively support parents with cognitive challenges.
2. The Ministry of Human Services should ensure that the changing circumstances of children and families are continuously reassessed and reflected in child intervention case planning. Caseworkers need the support and training for reflective practice that shows clear assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation as a child and their family's needs and circumstances change.

21 Child Intervention Services were provided by a Delegated First Nation Agency (DFNA).

8-Year-Old Ella

Ella passed away from an overdose of sleeping medication. She was in the care of Child Intervention Services and living in a group home when she died. She had severe global developmental delays and was on a number of medications. Although there was a police investigation and an autopsy, how Ella came to have a toxic level of sleeping medication in her system remains uncertain.

The Investigative Review examined three systemic issues:

- Risk assessment and collaboration;
- Specialized placements;
- Medication management for children in care.

A review of these systemic issues resulted in three recommendations:

1. a) The Ministry of Human Services should establish training for all frontline child intervention caseworkers, specifically related to understanding children with disabilities and/or complex needs.

   b) The Ministry of Human Services should ensure that child intervention and FSCD workers are aware of the existing Program Coordination Protocol between Child Intervention Services and Family Supports for Children with Disabilities.

2. The Ministry of Human Services should identify a continuum of placement options for children in care with disabilities and/or complex needs and ensure that adequate placement options and supports are available.

3. The Ministry of Human Services should ensure that all caregivers are aware of and follow their policies, procedures and practices in the administration and monitoring of medications.

17-Year-Old Catherine

Catherine was found deceased near her family home. She died by suicide. Catherine received mental health services from the time she was 10 years old. She was briefly involved with Child Intervention Services before she passed away.

Alberta Health Services (AHS) conducted an internal investigation and their recommendations, approved for implementation, were considered throughout this Investigative Review. The Advocate supports the AHS recommendations.

Two additional systemic issues were examined through the Investigative Review:

- Service coordination and collaboration;
- Suicide risk assessment.

A review of these systemic issues resulted in three recommendations:

1. Alberta Health Services should provide service coordinators for children with complex mental health needs and their families, who are accessing mental health services across multiple programs.

2. a) The Ministry of Human Services should intervene and strengthen their response when parents request help to keep their child safe because the parent is unable to.

   b) The Ministry of Human Services and Alberta Health Services should enter into a formal provincial agreement identifying how they will work collaboratively to serve young people with complex mental health needs when their safety is in jeopardy.

3. Alberta Health Services should review how young people attending hospitals are assessed for suicide risk and standardize best practices across the province.

Two-Year-Old Teanna: Serious Injury

Teanna suffered significant physical and emotional trauma while placed in a foster home. She was hospitalized for a potentially life-threatening internal injury. Her foster mother was subsequently charged with assault. Teanna does not appear to have long-term physical impairment from her injuries, but she suffers from emotional trauma that includes nightmares.

The Investigative Review examined two systemic issues:

- Child intervention case planning;
- Care provider's capacity to meet the child's needs.

A review of these systemic issues resulted in two recommendations:

1. The Ministry of Human Services should ensure:
   a) Documented case planning for children that includes both immediate attachment and long-term relationship needs, in addition to the considerations identified in the *Enhancement Act*.
   b) Case planning reflects clear transition strategies that mitigate the impact of multiple placement moves for children.
2. The Ministry of Human Services should ensure:
   a) That when a child has substantial medical and/or behavioural needs, the specific needs of the child are identified and documented, then matched to a care provider's capacity and potential support requirements, which is also documented, before the child is placed.
   b) That there is regular and ongoing assessment of a care provider's capacity to meet a child's needs. If there are indicators that the child's placement is in jeopardy, a timely re-assessment of the child's needs and their care provider's capacities must be completed and appropriate action taken.

17-Year-Old Makayla: Serious Injury

Makayla was seriously injured when she attempted suicide. She had significant involvement with Child Intervention Services and was first removed from her parents' care when she was about seven years old. When she was only 12 years old, there were extended periods of time when her whereabouts were unknown. She had over 20 placements by the time she was 17 years old.

The Investigative Review examined two systemic issues:

- The effect of loss and trauma on children and youth;
- The importance of reducing placement moves.

A review of these systemic issues resulted in two recommendations:

1. The Ministry of Human Services and its service delivery partners should ensure that:
   a) Young people involved with Child Intervention Services are assessed to identify the impact traumatic events have had on them;
   b) Case plans should detail interventions to directly address the identified trauma including resources required and expected outcomes; and,
   c) Interventions are reviewed on a regular basis and progress documented.
2. The Ministry of Human Services and its service delivery partners should ensure that placement moves for children and youth are planned. In situations where unplanned moves are unavoidable, mitigation strategies to address the impact of such moves are identified and documented.

10-Month-Old Lily

Lily drowned in a container of homemade alcohol while in the care of her mother. Lily was taken to the local health centre where she was pronounced deceased. She was a First Nation child who lived in a First Nation community with her parents and siblings. Lily's mother pled guilty to the charge of criminal negligence causing death.

The Investigative Review examined one systemic issue:

- Creating safe environments for children exposed to parental addictions.

A review of these systemic issues resulted in two recommendations:

1. The Ministry of Human Services should ensure that ongoing support and mentorship is provided to frontline workers to assist in the creation and planning of protective support networks for children living with parents who have addictions.
2. The Ministry of Human Services should ensure that those involved in support networks know what to do and who to notify when risk increases for a child.

Toward A Better Tomorrow: Addressing the Challenge of Aboriginal Youth Suicide

Over 18 months between June 2013 and December 2014, seven Aboriginal young people from different communities died by suicide:

- **14-Year-Old Asinay**
- **15-Year-Old Sage**
- **18-Year-Old Cedar**
- **15-Year-Old Morley**
- **15-Year-Old Kari**
- **15-Year-Old Victoria**
- **18-Year-Old Jacob**

Their stories are tragic. All seven experienced early childhood trauma, exposure to domestic violence, parental addictions or mental health problems. Many experienced the death of a family member by suicide. All were impacted by family disruption and the legacy of residential schools.

Suicide is one of the leading causes of death within the Aboriginal youth population. The suicide rate among First Nations male youth is five times higher, and among First Nations female youth it is seven time higher, compared to their non-Aboriginal peers.

The Investigative Reviews identified a number of opportunities for systemic improvement:

- Pursuing community-led strategies to address Aboriginal youth suicide;
- Addressing Aboriginal youth suicide holistically;
- Building on protective factors.

The Advocate made the following 12 recommendations:

1. a) The Government of Alberta should have a provincially funded suicide prevention strategy that supports the development and implementation of **community-led** strategies across the province. The strategy needs the capacity to adjust to accommodate the interests and needs of particularly vulnerable groups at elevated risk for suicide.

   b) Strategies to prevent Aboriginal youth suicide must be developed within the context, and in recognition of, the traditional values and cultural practices relevant to Aboriginal youth in the community.

2. The Government of Alberta should act on ways to improve provincial services and systems to support holistic community-led strategies to address Aboriginal youth suicide. For example, the government should consider:
    - Can these services and systems be used or leveraged to help reduce risk factors among Aboriginal youth and their families?
    - Does the current operation of these services and systems present any barriers that make it difficult to access assistance for at-risk Aboriginal youth?
    - How might these services and systems be inadvertently contributing to risk factors among at-risk Aboriginal youth and their families?

3. Alberta Human Services, with their service delivery partners, should ensure that supports are available to Aboriginal young people who have lost someone significant to suicide and that those services are deliberate and proactive.
4. The Ministry of Human Services should review child intervention case practice to ensure that intervention is focused on the child's needs. The impact on a child exposed to domestic violence, parental substance abuse, and other forms of child maltreatment must be addressed early in conjunction with their caregivers' treatment plans.
5. The Ministry of Human Services, with its service delivery partners, should ensure that case practice reflects a strength-based approach that focuses on the attachment needs of children while ensuring that their risk for harm is addressed.
6. Alberta Education should develop and implement school-based suicide prevention programs. Consideration should be given to developing a peer support component.
7. Alberta Mental Health Services should ensure that cultural components are incorporated in treatment strategies for young people.
8. The Government of Alberta should ensure that mental health programs are accessible, holistic and readily available in First Nations communities.
9. The Ministries of Human Services, Education and Health, along with their service delivery partners, should require that professionals working with Aboriginal young people have enhanced suicide intervention training.
10. The Ministries of Human Services, Education and Health, along with their service delivery partners, should require that professionals working with Aboriginal Peoples have adequate training regarding the pre- and post-colonial history specific to Aboriginal peoples so that they have a good understanding of the potential risks, strengths and needs within Aboriginal families.
11. Alberta Human Services should review the Delegation Training for Suicide Intervention Skills and ensure that it contains information about the need for culturally-relevant resources and how caseworkers can access them.
12. The Government of Alberta should support increased levels of self-determination of First Nations in Alberta through reconciliation processes in partnership with First Nations, federal and provincial governments. Consideration should be given to greater levels of self-determination regarding child intervention balanced with support as a protective factor for suicide prevention.

Appendix B

2015-2016 Summary of Concluded Reports of Serious Injury or Death of Young People

Closed After Examination

All reports of serious injuries and deaths are reviewed through the Examination Phase. This phase involves a review of the Report of Serious Injury or Death and a review of Child Intervention Services' electronic file information and contact with someone close to the young person (whenever possible, a family member).

During 2015-2016, the following reports were closed after the Examination phase because it was determined from the information gathered that there was limited potential for further learning and potential systemic issues had not been identified. Six of these reports were received during 2014-2015, while the remaining 33 were received during 2015-2016.

Reports of Death received in 2014-15 fiscal year and closed on Examination before March 31, 2016:

1. A 19-month-old infant died from complications related to stomach ulcers. Child Intervention Services had been involved with the family for some time. When the infant passed away, supports were being provided through a Supervision Order.[22]

2. A 17-month-old infant died from a severe brain injury. The explanation provided by his caregiver was inconsistent with the injury. His family had no prior involvement with Child Intervention Services until he was brought to hospital. A criminal investigation was underway when the OCYA closed the Examination.

3. A 22-month-old toddler, who had a number of medical diagnoses and was considered to be medically fragile, had a cardiac arrest and could not be revived. Child Intervention Services had been involved with the family for some time. When the toddler passed away, supports were being provided through a Family Enhancement Agreement.[23]

4. A six-month-old infant died from sepsis.[24] She had recently been diagnosed with a viral infection. Her family had no prior involvement with child intervention until she was brought to the hospital.

5. A 15-year-old young woman died by suicide. She was living with her parents. Her family had minimal involvement with Child Intervention Services and there was an open Screening[25] when the young woman passed away.

6. A 17-year-old young woman died in a house fire. At the time of her death, Child Intervention Services was involved with the family under a Safety Phase Assessment.[26] There had been some prior child intervention involvement but all supports and services were provided within the family home and she was in parental care when she passed away.

22 Supervision Order – The court grants mandatory supervision of a child to the Director. Guardianship remains with the family/legal guardian.

23 Family Enhancement Agreement – A voluntary agreement between Child Intervention Services and a child's guardian intended to address protections concerns while the child remains in the guardian's care.

24 A blood infection.

25 A report completed when Child Intervention Services receives a concern about the possible risk to a child according the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act.*

26 Safety Phase Assessment – A 10 day initial assessment that occurs to determine whether a child is in need of intervention according to the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act.*

Reports of Death received in 2015-2016 fiscal year and closed on Examination before March 31, 2016:

1. A ten-year-old girl passed away after being diagnosed with terminal Leukemia. She was in a hospital with her family by her side at the time of her death. Child Intervention Services was providing supports to the family under a Family Enhancement Agreement.

2. A 14-year-old boy passed away after complications from Cerebral Palsy. He had global developmental delays and was receiving palliative care after a diagnosis of kidney failure. At the time of his passing, he was the subject of a Permanent Guardianship Order and placed in a specialized residential placement.

3. A six-week-old infant was found unresponsive in his family home. His cause of death was undetermined.[27] It appears that he was sleeping with an adult in a single bed and co-sleeping may have been a contributing factor. At the time of his passing, Child Intervention Services was involved with the family under a Safety Phase Assessment.

4. A 14-year-old boy was found unresponsive in his bed at his long-term foster home. He was autistic, and had severe developmental delays, a seizure disorder and Syringomyelia.[28] His cause of death was due to Epilepsy. At the time of his passing, he was the subject of a Permanent Guardianship Order.

5. A 16-year-old young woman died by suicide. Child Intervention Services was involved with her family through a Screening. There had been some prior child intervention involvement but all services and supports were provided within the family home and she was living with her parents at the time of her death.

6. A five-year-old boy was hospitalized with a severe head injury and extensive bruising. Less than a week later, he was removed from life support and passed away. He was in the care of relatives through a private family arrangement when he was injured. There was no prior child intervention involvement; however, his injuries resulted in a referral to Child Intervention Services and he was apprehended. A criminal investigation was underway when the OCYA closed the matter on Examination.

7. A 14-year-old youth was a passenger in a motor vehicle that was involved in a collision. He passed away as a result of his injuries. At the time of his death, he was the subject of a Permanent Guardianship Order and had been living in the same foster home for a number of years.

8. A 15-year-old youth died as a result of a suspected suicide. She was in her parents' care at the time of her death and Child Intervention Services was involved through a Safety Phase Assessment. There had been some prior child intervention involvement but all services and supports were provided within the family home.

9. A 12-week-old old infant was found in medical distress at home and taken to hospital. He had suffered severe brain trauma and passed away the following day. There was no prior child intervention involvement; however, his injuries resulted in a referral to Child Intervention Services. A criminal investigation was underway when the OCYA closed the matter on Examination.

10. A 21-year-old young man was found deceased in his apartment. An acquaintance has been charged with manslaughter in relation to his death. Child Intervention Services had extensive involvement. At the time of his passing, the young man was receiving services through a Support and Financial Assistance Agreement and living independently.

11. A 15-year-old youth passed away from his injuries after falling from a window. His death is believed to have been accidental. Child Intervention Services was involved with his family under a Safety Phase Assessment. There had been some prior child intervention involvement, but services and supports were provided through agreements and the young man was never brought into care.

12. A 23-year-old young woman passed away in hospital from numerous health complications including a congenital heart condition. She had extensive child intervention involvement prior to her 18th birthday. She was the subject of a Permanent Guardianship Order and the involvement was extended through a Support and Financial Assistance Agreement. She lived in the same foster home for over 10 years, but was living independently prior to her admission to hospital.

27 In Alberta, "undetermined" cause of death now encompasses those deaths previously classified as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

28 A chronic progressive disease in which longitudinal cavities form in the cervical region of the spinal cord. This characteristically results in wasting of the muscles in the hands and a loss of sensation.

13. A ten-week-old infant was found unresponsive in his crib. Child Intervention Services was providing extensive in-home supports through a Safety Phase Assessment at the time of the infant's death. Police investigated and determined that the matter was not criminal. The preliminary cause of death is undetermined; the OCME has not concluded their investigation.

14. An 18-year-old young man was found deceased in his home. An acquaintance has been charged with homicide. His family had extensive child intervention involvement that ended within two years of his death. Child intervention supports and services were provided within the family; the young man was never brought into care.

15. A 16-month old infant was brought to hospital after falling into a hot tub. She was removed from life support and passed away. Her family had no prior involvement with child intervention until she was brought to hospital.

16. A 16-year-old young woman died by suicide. She was living with her parents when she passed away. She had minimal involvement with Child Intervention Services that ended within two years of her passing.

17. A 16-year-old medically fragile youth passed away from complications related to his medical condition. His family had minimal involvement with Child Intervention Services that ended within two years of his passing.

18. A three-month-old infant passed away because of injuries that were sustained in a household accident. Her family had minimal involvement with Child Intervention Services that ended within two years of her passing.

19. A two-year-old medically fragile infant with West Syndrome[29] passed away from complications related to his medical condition. His family had minimal involvement with Child Intervention Services that ended within two years of his passing.

20. A six-week-old infant passed away while in his parents' care. His cause of death has been classified as undetermined. His family had minimal involvement with Child Intervention Services that ended within two years of his passing.

21. A two-year-old toddler drowned in a pond near her home. Her family had minimal involvement with Child Intervention Services that ended within two years of her passing.

22. A 14-year-old youth died by suicide. She was living with her parents when she passed away. Her family had minimal involvement with Child Intervention Services that ended within two years of her passing.

23. An 18-year-old young woman died by suicide. She had multiple mental health diagnoses and was unable to live independently. She had extensive involvement with Child Intervention Services and had been the subject of a Permanent Guardianship Order until her 18th birthday, followed by a Support and Financial Assistance Agreement until she transitioned to adult services. At the time of her death, she was receiving financial and residential supports through Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) and Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD). The young woman was living in a supported independent living placement when she died. She had received child intervention services that ended within two years of her passing.

24. A 19-year-old young man passed away from a drug overdose, which may have involved Fentanyl.[30] It is believed that the overdose was accidental. He had significant involvement with Child Intervention Services that ended within two years of his passing. Child intervention supports and services were provided within the family; the young man was never brought into care.

25. A two-year old toddler was a victim of homicide. Criminal charges have been laid. She had minimal involvement with Child Intervention Services that ended within two years of her passing.

26. A seven-year-old boy was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor and passed away. His family had sporadic involvement with Child Intervention Services that ended within two years of his passing.

27. A two-year-old toddler passed away in his sleep. He was prone to illness and had a cough prior to his death. The OCME has not concluded their investigation, but preliminary information indicates that his cause of death is undetermined. The toddler had minimal involvement with Child Intervention Services that ended within two years of his passing.

29 A severe epilepsy syndrome.

30 Fentanyl - A fast-acting narcotic analgesic and sedative that is sometimes abused for its heroin-like effect.

28. A five-year-old child passed away in his sleep. He had a number of medical issues arising from Prader-Willi Syndrome.[31] His death was attributed to complications from his medical condition. He had minimal involvement with Child Intervention Services that ended within two years of his passing.

29. A 19-year-old young woman with significant medical diagnoses that left her fully dependent died in hospital from complications related to a bowel obstruction. She had spent most of her life in care with the same foster family. She remained under their care and guardianship through adult disability services. Child Intervention Services involvement had ended within two years of her passing.

30. An 18-year-old young woman died in a motor vehicle accident. She was the subject of a Permanent Guardianship Order until her 18th birthday. She had been in care most of her life and had received child intervention services within two years of her passing. At the time of her death, she was living with her long-time foster parents.

31. A three-month-old infant passed away while in her parents' care. Her cause of death has been classified as undetermined. She had minimal involvement with Child Intervention Services that ended within two years of her passing.

32. A seven-year-old child passed away unexpectedly after she was found unresponsive at home. She had minimal involvement with Child Intervention Services that ended within two years of her death. Her cause of death is unknown. The OCME was conducting an investigation when the OCYA closed the matter on Examination.

Reports of Serious Injury received in 2015-2016 fiscal year and closed on Examination before March 31, 2016:

1. A 16-year-old young woman was seriously injured after an attempted suicide. At the time of the incident, she was receiving Child Intervention Services under a Custody Agreement with Guardian[32] and living in a foster home. She is receiving ongoing mental health treatment.

Closed After Assessment

The Assessment Phase involves a review of the Examination Phase information; a review of all relevant hard copy files from Alberta Human Services; and contacts with collateral sources.

The following reports were closed after the Assessment Phase because it was determined that there was limited potential for further learning and systemic issues had not been identified. Thirteen of these reports were received during 2014-2015, while the remaining eight were received during 2015-2016.

Reports of Death received in 2014-2015 fiscal year and closed on Assessment before March 31, 2016:

1. A 14-year-old young woman died from a drug overdose. She had significant involvement with Child Intervention Services due to a high-risk lifestyle and her parents' inability to manage her behaviours. Services were provided under the *Enhancement Act* and *PSECA*. The young woman and her family received a number of supportive services including addictions counselling and mental health services. Contracted service providers and caseworkers provided timely, consistent and intensive services.

2. A 16-year-old young man died from stab wounds inflicted during a fight at a house party. Second-degree murder charges have been laid. Child Intervention Services had extensive involvement with this young man and his family that ended within two years of his passing.

3. A six-month-old infant died from hypoxic-ischemic encephalopathy.[33] He had been napping on an adult bed with a thick blanket when he was found having a seizure. The family had ongoing sporadic involvement with Child Intervention Services and, at the time of his passing, was receiving supports and services through a Family Enhancement Agreement.

4. A nine-year-old child was the victim of a homicide. First-degree murder charges have been laid. She had minimal involvement with Child Intervention Services that ended within two years of her passing.

31 Prader-Willi Syndrome (PWS) is a complex genetic condition that affects many parts of the body. Characteristics of PWS can include low muscle tone, short stature, cognitive disabilities, behavior problems and a chronic feeling of hunger that can lead to excessive eating and life-threatening obesity.

32 A voluntary agreement that allows a parent or guardian to place their child in the care and custody of Child Intervention Services.

33 Brain damage that occurs when an infant does not receive enough oxygen.

5. A 19-year-old young woman was found deceased from an overdose of alcohol and drugs. She was a transgendered young person involved in the sex trade. She had intermittent involvement with Child Intervention Services and was never brought into care. Child intervention involvement ended within two years of her passing. Although the matter did not proceed to a full investigative review, **the Child and Youth Advocate recommended the Ministry complete an internal review because learning opportunities were identified related to services provided to youth who struggle with addictions, sexual exploitation and mental health problems.** Further, there was an opportunity to gain understanding about the risk factors associated with young people who are part of the LGBTQ community.

6. A 13-year-old girl passed away due to complications from undiagnosed Crohn's Disease.[34] There was some Child Intervention Services involvement related to a custody dispute, but all supports and services were provided within the family. Child intervention involvement ended within two years of her passing. The Advocate recommended an internal review because learning opportunities were identified related to intervention services provided to children who might be at risk in the care of separated parents or guardians.

7. An 18-year-old young man was the victim of a homicide. Criminal charges have been laid. The young man had extensive involvement with Child Intervention Services. He was the subject of a Permanent Guardianship Order until his 18th birthday and continued to receive supports and services through a Support and Financial Assistance Agreement. He was living independently when he passed away.

8. A 19-year-old woman died by suicide. She had extensive involvement with Child Intervention Services and had been the subject of a Permanent Guardianship Order until her 18th birthday. Supports and services continued through a Support and Financial Assistance Agreement. She was living independently and had ongoing contact and support from her long term foster parents.

9. A three-month-old infant died from undetermined causes. It appears that the infant had been co-sleeping with an adult which raised the possibility of an unsafe sleep environment for an infant of his age. Child Intervention Services had minimal involvement and was involved through a Safety Phase Assessment at the time of his passing.

10. A 14-year-old youth with a history of depression and suicidal ideation was found deceased in her home. The OCME determined that her cause of death was multiple drug toxicity. She had minimal involvement with Child Intervention Services that ended within two years of her passing.

11. A 19-year-old young woman died from complications related to a gallstone in her bile duct. She had extensive involvement with Child Intervention Services that ended within two years of her passing. She was brought into care for a very brief period of time when she was younger; however, most of the supports and services were provided within the family.

12. A 17-year-old young man died from a drug overdose. He had minimal involvement with Child Intervention Services that ended within two years of his passing.

Reports of Serious Injury received in 2014-2015 fiscal year and closed on Assessment before March 31, 2016:

1. A 14-year-old young woman attempted suicide and was hospitalized. Her condition was critical but she has recovered. Child Intervention Services had minimal involvement with her and her family, to ensure that she had access to necessary medical and mental health supports. Their involvement ended when it was determined that her parent was following through with her care.

Reports of Death received in 2015-2016 fiscal year and closed on Assessment before March 31, 2016:

1. A 19-year-old young man died by suicide. At the time of his passing, he was receiving services from Child Intervention Services under a Support and Financial Assistance Agreement and residing in his own apartment. He had extensive child intervention involvement. He was provided numerous medical, professional and financial supports. Shortly before his death, it was reported that he had been doing better until the breakup of his relationship with his girlfriend.

34 An ailment that belongs to the "inflammatory bowel disease" family.

2. A five-year-old child was taken to hospital with significant injuries that were life-threatening and appeared to be non-accidental. She was placed on life supports but passed away. She and her family had extensive child intervention involvement. Although she had been in care, she was in her parents' care when she died. A criminal investigation was underway when the OCYA closed the matter following the Assessment.

3. A four-month-old infant died from undetermined causes. It appears that his death may be related to co-sleeping with an adult. There was limited child intervention involvement with his family that ended within two years of his passing.

4. A 13-year-old youth was diagnosed with terminal cancer and passed away in hospital. Child Intervention Services had extensive involvement with her family that ended within two years of her passing. All supports and services were provided within the family. The concerns were primarily related to exposure to domestic violence and parental addictions. Although the Advocate did not determine that a full Investigative Review was warranted, it was recommended the Ministry conduct an internal review related to supports provided to children who are exposed to domestic violence and addictions.

5. A 17-year-old young man who died by suicide was new to Alberta. He came to the attention of Child Intervention Services one week prior to his death because he was homeless. The involvement ended because he was connected to community resources.

6. A 17-year-old young woman died by suicide. She had received some Child Intervention Services within two years of her passing. All supports and services were provided within the family.

7. A two-year-old toddler drowned in a ditch filled with water. She had wandered out of an open door. There was minimal child intervention involvement that ended within two years of her passing.

Reports of Serious Injury received in 2015-2016 fiscal year and closed on Assessment before March 31, 2016:

1. A 17-year-old young man had extensive involvement with Child Intervention Services. He was seriously injured in two separate incidents. He was the subject of a Permanent Guardianship Order and living with a family member. His first injury was related to a suicide attempt and he was hospitalized under the *Mental Health Act*. Three months later, he had a second serious injury after an accidental overdose. He recovered quickly, was discharged from hospital and placed in Secure Services until his 18th birthday. He is currently receiving services under a Support and Financial Assistance Agreement.

Management's Responsibility for Financial Reporting

The financial statements of the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate (the "OCYA"), including the performance measures, are the responsibility of the Child and Youth Advocate.

Responsibility for the integrity and objectivity of the financial statements and performance results for the OCYA rests with the Child and Youth Advocate. I oversee the preparation of the OCYA's annual report, including financial statements and performance results. The financial statements and the performance results, of necessity, include amounts that are based on estimates and judgments.

The financial statements are prepared in accordance with Canadian public sector accounting standards. The performance measures are prepared in accordance with the following criteria:

- Reliability – information used in applying performance measure methodologies agrees with the underlying data for the current and prior years' results.
- Understandability – the performance measure methodologies and results are presented clearly.
- Comparability - the methodologies for performance measure preparation are applied consistently for the current and prior years' results.
- Completeness – goals, performance measures and related targets match those included in the OCYA's 2015-2018 Business Plan.

As Child and Youth Advocate, in addition to program responsibilities, I am responsible for the OCYA's financial administration and reporting functions. The OCYA maintains systems of financial management and internal control which give consideration to costs, benefits, and risks that are designed to:

- provide reasonable assurance that transactions are properly authorized, executed in accordance with prescribed legislation and regulations, and properly recorded so as to maintain accountability of public money;
- provide information to manage and report on performance;
- safeguard the assets and properties of the province under the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate's administration; and
- facilitate preparation of the OCYA's business plan and annual report.

In fulfilling my responsibilities for the OCYA, I have relied, as necessary, on the management of the OCYA.

[Original signed by Del Graff]

Child and Youth Advocate
Office of the Child and Youth Advocate
July 11, 2016

Ofiice of the Child and Youth Advocate
2015-2016 Financial Highlights
(in thousands)

	2015-2016 Budget	2015-2016 Actual	2014-205 Actual (Restated)
Operating Expenses by Program			
Child and Youth Advocate's Office	$ 741	$ 665	$ 691
Child and Youth Advocacy	3,170	3,096	2,969
Systemic Advocacy and Quality Assurance	823	334	273
Legal Representation for Children and Youth	3,990	3,898	4,262
Investigations	1,461	1,270	965
Engagement and Education	1,231	1,530	1,211
Strategic Support	2,187	2,604	2,273
Total Operating Expenses	**$ 13,603**	**$ 13,397**	**$ 12,644**
Total Capital Investment	**$ 50**	**$ 87**	**$ 75**

2015-2016 Actual to 2015-2016 Budget Comparison

Total operating expenses for the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate (the "OCYA") in 2015-2016 were approximately $13.4 million; $206 thousand lower than budget (1.5 per cent). The variance between budget and actuals is distributed as follows:

Voted operating expenses	$ 90,000
Non-voted non-cash disbursements	116,000

Voted operating expenses were $90 thousand less than budgeted. The unexpended budget was primarily due to savings from staff vacancies which were offset by increased costs incurred for the Child and Youth Advocate's special report on the over-representation of Aboriginal children in care, and the migration of the OCYA's program applications out of the Ministry of Human Services' technical environment to the OCYA's environment.

Non-cash disbursements refer to amortization and valuation adjustments. The primary variance between budget and actual disbursements related to the lower than estimated change in the vacation pay liability from the previous year.

Voted capital investment was over budget by $37 thousand (74 per cent). This was due to increased requirements for hardware to support the program applications that were moved in 2015-2016 to the OCYA's technical environment.

Overall, the OCYA's voted operating and capital expenses were $53 thousand under the 2015-2016 voted budget.

2015-2016 Actual to 2014-2015 Actual Comparison

Total operating expenses increased by $753 thousand (6 per cent) over the 2014-2015 fiscal year. This was primarily due to an increase in salaries and benefits related to a general salary increase of 2.25 per cent for staff, as well as an increase in staff in the Investigations' program. In 2015-2016 the OCYA also saw an increase in spending to support the migration of the program applications to the OCYA information technology environment, this included increased costs in systems maintenance, hardware, software and licensing purchases. Other increases in 2015-2016 over the previous fiscal year relate to the Child and Youth Advocate's special report, resulting in increased costs in the areas of contracts, honoraria, travel and hosting for focus groups and forums.

The above increases over the prior year were offset by an overall decrease of approximately $500 thousand in legal fees and disbursements in the Legal Representation for Children and Youth program. This decrease was due to a lower number of children receiving legal representation and changes in billing processes.

There was a minor increase in Capital Investment of $12 thousand over the previous year relating to the purchase of new hardware for the program applications.

For further financial information refer to the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate's Audited 2015-2016 Financial Statements on our website at http://www.ocya.alberta.ca/adult/publications/annual-reports/

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